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TORONTO

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND WORSHIP

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PREFACE.

ON THE THEOLOGY OF MODERN SERMONS.

THE sermon is, I believe, still the most generally valued, although it is also the most criticised of the Church's offices. Sermons are frequently blamed, and universally required. Their omission is resented as the abandonment by the clergy of their most useful and their most difficult function. They appeal to many whom the other parts of our public worship fail to move. Real prayer has been described by Coleridge as an arduous mental effort. There are probably many in our churches who do not in any real sense pray, or whom the language of the Liturgy, often at least, leaves untouched. Long use and wont cause the stately cadences to fall like muffled notes upon their ears. Still, these very persons may be the preacher's best listeners. They are prepared to hear

him, if not with unquestioning acceptance, at least with respectful attention.

This insistent demand for sermons, together with the equally frequent admission of their actual shortcomings, is surely a noticeable sign of the times. It is at once the confession of a need and a lament over the need's imperfect satisfaction. It forces us to conclude that what is asked for is, in many cases, not given, or that what is actually offered is not what is required.

How shall we account for this frequent, and, as it may well seem, pathetic missing of the mark? The composition of a conscientious sermon, in spite of Dr. Johnson,* involves considerable labour. Long practice, while it lightens some difficulties, creates others equally serious. Yet the labour, if we may judge by the general verdict, is often spent in vain. The source of the waste must be sought in some want of harmony between the preacher and his listeners. He may be equipped with the necessary knowledge and earnestness, he

* Boswell, ed. Birkbeck Hill, iii. 437. "The composition of sermons is not very difficult." Cp. also ii. 173 upon the greater attention paid to sermons than to prayers.

will still fail if his starting-point is different from theirs, if he begins too far back for them, or not far enough back. That lucid expositor, Professor Huxley, said that he made it his invariable practice in his discourses to begin at the beginning, and to assume little or no knowledge of the subject on the part of his hearers. What, however, is to be the beginning of the sermon ?

The experience of the present writer leads him to believe that preachers do not, for the most part, go far enough back in their discourses to meet the thoughts of their listeners. They leave behind them when they begin too many unanswered questions and importunate perplexities. Speaker and audience have not settled beforehand the terms of their companionship.

1. Thus it is almost universally taken for granted that the great conception of God presents no ambiguity, whereas the ineffable name does not probably suggest the same idea to any two reflecting minds. God is represented in the Bible as descending from the heaven to the earth, as speaking with men face to face, as feeling towards them love, anger, grief,

pity. We find Him delivering a law to be a light to their feet and a lantern to their paths. Through the entire Old Testament it is assumed that the nation of whom we are reading can be in no doubt about what He requires of them. When they violate His behests they appear to be without excuse. It is not to be wondered at if the conclusion should seem inevitable that at some time or other a chasm must have been made in human experience effecting a fundamental difference between the reaches of time on the hither and those on the farther side. Yet such a conclusion is expressly contradicted by many passages of the very Book which seems imperatively to call for it. If we find God speaking with Moses as a man speaks with his friend, we read also that no man has at any time seen Him, that no man can see Him and live, that there is no similitude, earthly or heavenly, to which He can be likened. Nor, search as we may, can we find any indication of a turning-point in human affairs when the heavens were shut off from the earth. The deeper our studies go the more convincing become the evidences that God

was not nearer or more visible to Abraham or to Moses than He is to us. Here, then, it will be seen, is one point, and that a very important one, on which the preacher and his listeners need to come to an understanding before they can travel onwards together. They must know what they mean when they speak of God, His nature and His operations.

2. Another group of ambiguities cluster round the name of Christ. Few, I believe, realise the difficulties which the language of S. Paul's epistles presents to an ordinary reader anxious to understand what he reads. Shame would assuredly cover the faces of the clergy if they could see the unanswered questions which the reading of many a familiar chapter has suggested to some of the most devout of their hearers. We talk thoughtlessly of the "simplicity of the Gospel." It must be remembered that the writings of S. Paul were recognised from the very beginning as "hard to be understood,"* and that they have not become easier with the lapse of time. The difficulty centres in the Apostle's relation to his Master. Mysterious, indeed, this rela-

* 2 Peter iii. 16.

tionship will ever remain. The movements of the spirit follow a path which no fowl knoweth and which the vulture's eye hath not seen. Still, the transition from the earthly Jesus to the heavenly Christ, in the case of the Apostle and his converts, is neither inconceivable nor unaccountable. It can, in some measure, be elucidated by history and experience. Too often, however, the mystery of the Incarnation is treated as if it were capable of no such illumination. So the preacher leaves a second set of importunate problems unsolved behind him. What do we mean when we say that God was made man? How shall we bridge the interval between the close of S. Mark's gospel and the opening paragraph of the Epistle to the Ephesians?

3. A third set of unanswered questions arise out of the hope of immortality. Ruskin, it will be remembered, said in one of his prefaces* that he did not know, in addressing his countrymen, whether he should regard them as believers or disbelievers in a life beyond the grave. There is, indeed, perhaps, no point within the scope of religion on which real and

* *Crown of Wild Olive.*

PREFACE

avowed belief differ more markedly than they do here. The disappearance of the old conceptions of heaven and hell, the quickened sense of the vastness of the universe, the weakening of all external authority in matters of religion, whether it be that of the Church or the Bible--these have combined with other and less obvious influences to shut out many from what will ever be the most consoling of human visions. We still, when we stand at the grave-side, use the unfaltering language of the Liturgy, and commit the poor body to the earth in the sure and certain hope of resurrection. How often must the calm confidence of the words rebuke the doubts and perplexities alike of speaker and hearers! Here is one more subject of universal and abiding interest, on which the preacher will often be found, we believe, to be separated from his listeners. His thoughts do not meet theirs. He makes assumptions which they do not admit. He appeals to motives to which they do not respond. The hope of immortality needs to be presented in such a way that it will again move the imagination and kindle the heart. Why should this be deemed impossible?

These are, indeed, weighty subjects, nor should the note of exposition be the one most audible in the sermon. Its primary object is not to impart information, but to edify, to kindle faith, hope, and love. The knowledge communicated is offered, not for its own sake, but as a necessary step towards an ulterior end. The printed page, however, admits of greater formality than is possible in the pulpit.

The writer, therefore, prefaces the sermons contained in this volume with a brief statement of the assumptions underlying them on these three fundamental points :

1. It is assumed that the relations between God and the soul have remained through human history constant and invariable. It is taken for granted that the Eternal Being has never come, within the reach of the senses. The theophanies of the Old Testament will be found never to amount to any sensual disclosure. The curtain seems on the point of being withdrawn, but it is never actually lifted. From the beginning the silence has remained unbroken. When God has spoken with man the person so privileged has not seen Him with

the eye nor heard Him with the ear. Abraham, Moses, David and Isaiah have been in this respect precisely as we are. When the Divine word has sounded within their souls, they have seen no form, heard no articulate voice. They have been shut up, like ourselves, within the inexorable limits of their bodily nature. And their difficulty has been our own—to distinguish the Divine voice from the promptings of their own imperious self-love or tumultuous passion. Revealed truth is thus not a body of knowledge miraculously imparted, but the sifted and approved religious convictions of humanity, won by long ages of painful thought and perplexing experience. As much of it as man will ever need for his guidance and consolation is to be found in the Bible. The Church's task is to guard this truth, to protect it from the assaults of shifting fashion, to subject it to ever-renewed verification, and to adjust it to the ever-widening knowledge of mankind.

2. The writer finds the evidence of the Incarnation where the first Christian generation found it,—in the attestation given by history to the supremacy of Christ. The occurrences of

the first half-century of Christian experience,—the rapid progress of the faith, its acceptance by men severed by wide differences of race, education, and temperament, its promise to lay the foundations of a new social order, and restore a decaying world—these were to the earliest Christians the convincing proofs that God was indeed in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, effacing the barriers of a divided humanity, and making mankind as one new man in Christ Jesus. Realising the work of Christ within their own souls, marking His redeeming, sanctifying operations in the world without, they acknowledged that God had indeed visited His people, that He had purchased for Himself a Church with His own blood.* In no long time innocent confusions and interested perversions made it necessary to express these spontaneous convictions in formal language. One very early summary of Christian belief soon won for itself universal recognition, and has been transmitted to us under the name of the Apostle's Creed.

3. The weakening of the hope of immortality seems traceable in very large measure to a con-

* Acts xx. 28.

founding of the limits of faith and knowledge. The Apostle said that he and his converts were begotten again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* The object of all Christian preaching may be said to be the strengthening of this hope, the deliverance of the soul from the fear of spiritual destruction, its upraising into a region where “death has ceased to count.” This hope seems to find expression in parental love, in all noble ambition, even in the desire for posthumous fame. We appear to be in its presence when we see life either wholly or in part sacrificed for some disinterested end. Still, what we recognise in all these forms alike is hope—often unconscious of itself, and voiceless—and not knowledge or assurance. The soul is reaching towards some reality which, tied and bound as it now is, it is not able fully to grasp. It is moved by impulses of which it can give no clear account. The hope can obviously be strengthened, not by invoking the precarious help of the pictorial imagination, but by strengthening the soul and fostering that love of God and man which is stronger than death. The consciousness of an

* 1 Pet. i. 3.

eternal life already begun would seem to be the only secure support for the hope of immortality.

Such are the most important assumptions which lie below these sermons. A word should perhaps also be said upon the view taken of the Bible and its inspiration. The critical study of the Old and the New Testaments has now been pursued for nearly a century and a half. The time has surely come when the results of this study may be used in the Church's ordinary teaching. It may, indeed, be urged that the controverted points are still numerous and important, and that much is still in the position of doubtful hypothesis or plausible conjecture. It is true that biblical scholars at home and abroad have had to recede from many positions once pronounced impregnable, that there have been, as in all tentative sciences, hasty conclusions, and that the love of truth has sometimes been deflected from its goal by the spirit of partisanship. Still, when all deductions have been made, the prolonged intellectual travail has borne imperishable fruit. The Christian teacher finds himself in the presence of results which he cannot ignore.

The present volume contains six sermons on a subject on which research has been especially busy—that of the Eucharist. The history of the Eucharist has been said to be almost the equivalent of the history of the Church. It is, in any case, true that the Eucharist has, from the moment of its institution, represented the faith and hope of Christians. It has at once expressed and cemented the relation of the Christian disciple to his Master. Historical study leaves us here, indeed, with questions to which we are not in a position to return any very positive answer. Still, it has thrown a flood of light upon the circumstances of our Lord's last supper, upon its relation to the Jewish passover, and to His own impending death. The writer has done his utmost to acquaint himself with the extensive literature which the subject has called forth in recent years at home and abroad, and has endeavoured to disengage the spiritual truths which investigation shows to be permanently enshrined in the Eucharist.

Historical study cannot, indeed, make a devout communicant. It can only remove misunderstandings which may forbid an
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approach to the Holy Table, or deaden the searching call of the Eucharistic feast. The subject is one on which ignorance is especially likely to awaken superstitious fears, or to occasion reluctant abstention. On the other hand, the equally serious dangers of misuse or merely mechanical observance are best obviated by candid and reverent research. The writer is persuaded that the appeal of the Eucharist becomes more constraining, and its messages, alike to the heart and the understanding, more clear, when its beginnings are contemplated in all their touching simplicity.

* * * * *

On re-reading the sermons included in the volume, I am conscious of an indebtedness which I can no longer measure to other writers as well as to those whose names appear in the notes. The first sermon recalls to me one on the same subject by Archdeacon Wilson, which greatly impressed me when I read it, years ago. The sermon on the *Life Eternal* reminds me of one by the Rev. J. Llewelyn Davies, a teacher to whom I owe much. I have also been greatly helped by the sermons of J. B. Mozley, and by the discourses of Schleiermacher.

If the reader should discover other unacknowledged obligations, I hope he will ascribe the omission to forgetfulness on my part, and not to deliberate ingratitude.

It is only necessary to add that the only consecutive sermons in the volume are those on the Eucharist. The others were preached separately, sometimes at long intervals, and are grouped, as shown in the Table of Contents, from the similarity of their subjects.

J. G.

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I. FAITH IN GOD.

GOD IS SPIRIT.*

S. JOHN iv. 24. R.V. margin.

THE starting-point of all religion is the awful thought of God. From this all else in religion proceeds, as a stream from its source. The differences which separate religious men into opposing camps, which create heresies and sects and parties, will be found, if they are traced back far enough, to have their sources here. It is at this point, on the very threshold of religion, that the ways begin to diverge.

There may be some in this congregation—there are sure to be some in every congregation—whose minds are baffled and perplexed when they lift them up to this awful subject. The conceptions they formed when they were children have been broken up, and they have not found any firmer ones to put in their places. When the solemn Advent call, “Prepare to

* Preached on Advent Sunday.

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meet thy God," sounds in their ears, it awakens no very distinct expectations and suggests no very distinct duties to their minds. They are at a loss to know when the dread meeting shall take place, or what form it shall assume. They say they cannot prepare for it in earnest, because they do not know what it will be like.

It is to such I would especially now speak, and remove, if I can, some of their perplexities in as far as they may be the results of misunderstandings and confusions. The subject demands from us the utmost reverence, but, at the same time, honesty of mind. We must beware of all high-sounding words, which often in these difficult matters hide from us our own ignorance.

Let us observe, then, that the intervention of God in human affairs is pictured in the Bible in two different fashions, and this difference may easily puzzle readers who have not discovered the secret of the ambiguity.

The ambiguity arises from this, that in some passages, and especially in the earlier books, the Apostle's great saying, "No man has seen God at any time," appears to be contradicted, and God is represented as assuming

a visible form, and speaking to men words which they hear with their outward ears.

Now, we know from the examples of the Jewish prophets how such language is in all probability to be understood. We are to read it with the knowledge that the prophet is representing as an outward occurrence that which has really taken place within his own soul, that he is projecting, so to speak, an inward and spiritual experience into the world outside, just as a picture is thrown from the magic lantern upon the curtain in front. Thus, when Jeremiah shrinks from the prophet's task and pleads that he is a child, and that he cannot speak, there ensues what appears to be an ordinary human dialogue between him and the Most High. God commands, and the prophet objects, and God again silences his objections. So we might suppose that there were two speakers. The narrative, however, makes it quite clear that the whole occurrence takes place, not outside, but within the prophet's soul. For it is not the Lord who comes to him, but the "Word" of the Lord, that word which we hear most distinctly when all outside is still.

As we know it to have been in the case of this prophet, so we may confidently believe it always was. The interviews between mortal man and the Most High, recorded in the books of Genesis and Exodus, are spiritual experiences represented as ordinary human meetings, just as Our Lord's temptation in the wilderness was a temptation, not outside, but within His soul.

When God is, however, thus separated from the spirit, and the inward experience represented as if it were something external, then He appears as what is called a transcendent Person.

So He was represented in the childhood of the human race. So we represented Him to ourselves when we were children.

We thought of Him as separated from us by space, as dwelling in some place beyond the stars, as needing to descend in order to come to us. We thought that our souls would mount upwards at death to enter His Presence Chamber.

You will, I am sure, bear me out when I say that these conceptions become more dim and indistinct as our minds grow. We give

up one concrete feature after another. We are driven, as it were, from point to point, away from the known outwards towards the unknown, away from the firm land towards the illimitable sea. We cannot find a place that we can accept as God's abode, because wherever our minds travel, the same conditions seem to be round us with which we are familiar here. We cannot think of creation as we once did, for we see it to be a continuous process and not a single act.

Thus our early pictures of God become more and more indistinct, until at last, perhaps, they appear to have faded quite away. Trait after trait vanishes, until nothing appears to be left of the original conception. There is no part of it of which we have not been dispossessed. The process is seen even by the names we use to describe God. At first we use this word itself as if it were a proper name. Then we speak of God as The Almighty. Then we go still further from the concrete, and describe Him as the Infinite or the Absolute. The names bear witness that we are leaving the near and the easily understood, and moving away towards the

distant and indescribable. At last we avoid the name altogether and use such paraphrases as heaven or the perfect truth or justice.

No doubt I am describing very imperfectly, still I believe I am describing truly, a process which some at least who listen to me will recognise as an experience of their own. Often the process pursues its course unobserved until at length a moment comes, perhaps on the threshold of manhood or womanhood, when the soul awakens with bitter anguish to a full consciousness of what has long been taking place in silence. It finds that the likeness of the Eternal Being it had fashioned for itself has faded away, and that the canvas is empty. Nothing remains but some vague lines which represent nothing that is recognisable. No form is left. No hand is there to cling to—no breast on which to bury the throbbing head.

If such should be the position of any here, I would remind them that what has faded away is not God, nor yet the assurance of His Presence, but only the picture by which they had thought they could represent 'Him' to the bodily eye. He has never been at any time

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within reach of the senses. He has neither body, parts, nor passions. No eye has ever beheld Him. He has always been Spirit, *i.e.* not a phantom, but a Being who could only be spiritually discerned, who held converse only with the spirit. Thus the theophanies of ancient times, the interviews and dialogues between man and God in the Old Testament —Abraham at Mamre, Jacob at Peniel, Moses at Horeb, Elijah at Carmel, Isaiah in the Temple—these are all parabolic representations of spiritual communion, records of crises in these men's lives when, like Job, they have exchanged a hearsay for a real knowledge of Him—have exchanged, as we should say, words for things.

Thus I come to that other representation of God in Scripture, where what I have said is taken for granted, where there is no parable, and where the spirit is recognised as the only possible meeting-place between the creature and the Creator.

Thus Our Lord says in S. John's Gospel, “If any man love Me he will keep My sayings, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode

with him." Such a man will be assured of the Divine Presence, not by meeting with God, as we are apt to suppose Abraham did on the plains of Mamre, but by finding within his own experience evidences, distinct and various, that God lives and reigns.

So again S. Paul teaches that God manifests Himself to us, that we see and know Him in as far as we live in the Spirit, in as far as love, joy, peace and the other fruits of the Spirit of Holiness are present within our hearts and lives. He would wish us to look for God, to own His Presence in these happy spiritual states. He implies that no other manifestations of the Divine Being are within our reach. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard things which can only be revealed by the Spirit. The unseen world is not within the reach of our bodily faculties. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor doth corruption inherit incorruption.

I will not attempt to illustrate further from the New Testament the truth upon which I am insisting. Search it from end to end and you will find that, throughout, God is represented to us as making Himself known to us

chiefly in the movements that constitute the spirit's life, our joys and sorrows, our struggles with sin, our dissatisfaction with ourselves, our aspirations towards the Eternal World. He has ceased to be a Person outside us, and has associated Himself with us in union awful and yet sweet. There is no theophany in the New Testament, except that last theophany in which One, like unto us in all things save sin, offers to impart Himself to us, and to be in us even as He is in the Father; telling us that the eternal life is a life of the spirit to which we can even now attain, and that it consists in a knowledge of Him and the Father.

I should only be wearying you if I were to develop this thought further. Yet I am conscious of having failed to give it half the vividness it possesses even for my own mind. I can only hope that such a presentation of it as I have been able to give may convince some, who have felt the horror of the gradual vanishing of God in the world, that it was not God Himself who was leaving them, but that it was only representations of Him formed by their minds in childhood, which were gradually being dissipated by the solvent action of the

reason. There is nothing in this to be wondered at or regretted. There was no permanence or stability in these early representations. God has ever been Spirit, dwelling in light unapproachable, Whom no man hath seen nor can see. Only in spirit has man ever held converse with Him.

I will venture to illustrate one of the innumerable applications of the truth by some verses found recently among the papers of an English poet* who now, we trust, sees God even as He is. The verses are manifestly unfinished, and show signs at many points of having been reserved by their author for further elaboration at some future time. Still, in spite of their ruggedness, they give very forcible and pathetic expression to the truth that the Kingdom of God is within us, and the spirit the appointed place of meeting with the Most High. The verses bear the title "In no strange land," and among them are these :

"But when so sad thou canst not sadder,
Cry; and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder,
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross..

* Francis Thompson.

Doth the fish soar to find the Ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the Air,
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of Thee there ?

Not where the whirling systems darken
And our benumbed conceiving soars ;
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places,
Turn but a stone and start a wing ;
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces
That miss the many splendoured thing.

Yea, in the night, my soul, my daughter,
Cry, clinging Heaven by the hem,
And lo ! Christ walking on the water,
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames.

Let us be careful, then, how we impair the fidelity of a mirror upon which so much depends. Every wrong we do, every fault that we allow to gain the ascendancy over us makes the spirit less able to reveal God. It is these self-injuries which form the greatest barriers between us and Him, which shut us out most effectually from the light of His countenance. If I should be addressing any one who fears that he may be losing this light, let me intreat him to be on his guard against all pride, selfishness, worldly living ; to

endeavour by close watchfulness over himself to make his heart a fit dwelling-place for Him who chooses above all temples, rich with gold and silver, the humble and contrite heart. Let him endeavour to "see" Jesus, to follow Him in love to men and perfect self-oblation to the Father, and he will indeed be preparing to meet his God, to see Him whom now he beholds in invisible Presence, face to face.

GOD'S DOINGS IN THE DAYS OF OLD.

"We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what Thou hast done in their days, in the times of old."

PSALM xliv. 1.

ON this day we lift up our minds to that Eternal Being whom no man hath seen or can see, but with whom we are more intimately related than with any other person or thing. It is of more consequence to us how we think of Him than how we think of father or mother, wife or husband. Our relationship with Him began before any of these relationships, and it will survive them all. The first of all commandments is that we should love God with heart and soul and strength; and if we fear to displease Him there is nothing else we need be afraid of.

Experience leads us to believe that many persons are perplexed and bewildered at the

* Preached on Trinity Sunday.

present time by misapprehending what the Church of Christ teaches concerning God, how it wishes us to represent Him to our minds, and to conceive His operations.

The fundamental mistake is to suppose that the Infinite Being has at some time in the remote past come within the visible sphere, that He has revealed Himself to the senses of particular men, and communicated to them certain truths beyond the reach of our human faculties, which they transmitted to their children, and which have thus passed on through the centuries to us.

There is nothing, however, in the Bible to support any such notion. There is no mention of the giving of a revelation such as this would be. It is nowhere hinted of anyone that he received such a revelation. This is not said of Adam, or Abraham, or Moses, and these are perhaps the only men of whom it would occur to us to make such a supposition. We nowhere read of God in His own Being appearing to men, and the Apostle expressly tells us that He has never at any time been seen. This is not because He is unwilling to make Himself known, but

because we have not faculties to apprehend Him.

Thus we must represent Him to ourselves in quite a different fashion. We must think of Him as remaining throughout beyond the visible or sensual sphere, as dwelling in light unapproachable, unseen by mortal eye, inconceivable by the mind of man, indescribable by human tongue or human pen.

The intercourse between Him and His human creatures has consisted in this, that they have never ceased to seek after Him, to reflect upon His nature, and upon what He required of them, and to look upon the events that befell them as indications of His purposes.

So they have come to understand Him better as the ages passed. Their conceptions of Him have been bit by bit purified and ennobled: the dross of human passion has been purged away. And if this search after Him on their part has been rewarded with ampler and ampler success, it is because He wished it to be so. If they have found Him in increasing measure, it is because He wished to be found. They could not have drawn

near to Him if He had not at the same time drawn near to them.

Thus the great channel of revelation has been human history. Men have seen that events have unrolled themselves in a definite order, that they did not happen at random, but that they followed a continuous course, both in human history regarded as a whole, and in the history of particular nations.

Still, we shall all feel that our position would be a somewhat pathetic one if this were a full account of it, for we should only be groping after an unknown reality, straining our eyes after an object which we knew to be beyond our sight. We should not feel sure that the great reality might not be blind and deaf—a pitiless force like the law of gravitation.

It is at this point—when our reasonings end in sadness—that Christ joins Himself to us, and imparts to us if we will remain in His company something of His own faith and hope. He clothes the unseen God, so to speak, with a human vesture; He teaches us to speak to Him; He tells us of a union with Him, in love and obedience, of great closeness.

So He brings us into a relationship to the unseen God which, when we have once experienced it, justifies itself, and which gives us a key to the world and to ourselves. When we have learned to think of the Father in this way, not only does the thought bring us consolation; it makes us better able to live, it suffuses our being with a tenderness which without it we could scarcely have. We love each other better, we are more compassionate towards each other's shortcomings, if we believe in the love of God towards us.

Thus, as we look at the fortunes of our race in the past, we regard this history as the revelation of an Eternal Being who is leading mankind onwards towards a definite goal, and who is making all things work together for good to them who love Him.

So I understand the doctrine of the Trinity. I recognise the ultimate source of being to be inconceivable by any faculties we possess. So far we must all be agnostics. But then in this uncertainty we humbly endeavour to unite ourselves with Christ in the spiritual union of which He spoke. We pray, as He taught us, that we may be in Him and He in

us, even as He was in the Father and the Father in Him. And we know that such a union can only be maintained by the spirit He has given us—the spirit of truth and love, of knowledge and wisdom and godly fear.

Thus thinking of God we look back upon the past, and learn from those able to tell us what He has done in the days of old.

The words almost inevitably suggest to us startling and memorable occurrences. They recall victories in war, or visitations of famine and pestilence, or some striking discovery like that of the New World. We associate God with the exceptional rather than with the customary, with convulsions and revolutions rather than with the even course of Nature.

It may, however, with truth be said that nations and families are most happy when nothing is befalling them worthy of being recorded. "The oak grows silently," it has been well written, "in the forest, a thousand years; only in the thousandth year, when the woodman arrives with his axe, is there heard an echoing through the solitudes; and the oak announces itself when, with far-sounding crash, it falls. How silent, too, was the

planting of the acorn, scattered from the lap of some wandering wind ! Nay, when our oak flowered, or put on its leaves, what shout of proclamation could there be ? Hardly from the most observant a word of recognition. These things *befell* not, they were slowly *done* ; not in an hour, but through the flight of days : what was to be said of it ? This hour seemed altogether as the last was, as the next would be." *

So, indeed, every noteworthy occurrence, even if it be a glad one, is of the nature of a dislocation. It is something unusual ; it breaks the even tenor of life. When an instrument is working most effectively, it works in silence : it is only when it gets, as we say, out of order that it begins to creak and rumble and squeal.

Even in the moral and spiritual life, silent continuousness is better than convulsions. It is better that our days should be linked each to each in natural piety, than that we should fall grievously and rise again. We are never so happy, and probably never so useful, as when each day appears to be an exact repeti-

* Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*.

tion of the day before. This is the most favourable situation for effective work, and perhaps the most favourable one for growth in grace. To secure such a situation nothing is so essential as order and regularity. We must allow no arrears of any kind to mount up until we are no longer able to cope with them ; ever in our ears must be the words, "Now is the accepted time." Nor, on the other hand, must we fret over water spilt upon the ground : we must try to turn the odd moments of life to account : we must protect ourselves against loss and danger by habit. So we may hope to escape the unhappiness of those who waste their strength in idle wishes and useless regrets, who live in an atmosphere of worry and discontent.

And even of the striking events, perhaps those are not the best worth recalling of which we commonly think first. Perhaps those who inserted these words of my text in our Litany were thinking especially of such occurrences in history as the defeat of the Spanish Armada, or the sudden retreat of the Assyrian host from before Jerusalem. But the fact that such escapes took place once does really afford no

presumption that if the circumstances recurred they would take place again. If a hostile fleet were approaching our shores, we could not expect a tempest to scatter it. If a foreign army were advancing upon London we could not count upon an outbreak of pestilence to lay it low. It is far more inspiring to think of those great deeds which are in no sense miraculous, but which are the results of human courage and patience and skill. These are the acts which most move us to thank God, because we may reasonably hope to see them repeated if only our patience and courage are equal to those of our ancestors. In one sense it is men like ourselves who have done these things ; in another sense it is God Himself who has wrought them, because He has both inspired them and brought them to perfection.

Would we see God, then, revealing Himself plainly in the years that are past, of what must we think ? Not chiefly of the exceptional deliverances—the sudden staying of the plague, the filling up of the gulf by the warrior's heroism, the startling dispersal of the great hostile army. For we have no as-

surance that such mercies would be repeated if we were in similar peril. We must rather think of what God has enabled ordinary men and women, not specially gifted or favoured, to accomplish. Think of the way the British Empire has reached its present dimensions : it has grown, not through the acts of official authority, but through the enterprise of private individuals. So the Empire of India and the Dominion of Canada were brought under the authority of the British Crown : the wars to which these acquisitions gave rise only registered what were already established facts. The expansion of the British Empire is a record—the most wonderful in history—of individual initiative, of the labours of men unsupported, often hindered, by official authority. Or look at the history of our English Church : there too we see the great achievements of men in humble stations, who asked of God only that He would permit them to serve Him, and who neither sought nor obtained any worldly distinction. Such were Keble and Newman and Maurice and Robertson ; these are perhaps the most influential English Churchmen of the nineteenth century ; not one

of them owed anything to official patronage. Such was many a faithful parish priest whose name is unknown in history. Or let us think of the annals of our own family. We can all find there, I do not doubt, speaking instances of God's doings in the days of old, memorials of men and women who bore heavy loads with Christian fortitude, and fulfilled important duties in silence. It is persons such as these who maintain and perpetuate that great tradition of unobtrusive obedience to the Divine Will which is our best reason for thankfulness in the past, our surest hope for the future, by which God does verily and indeed become

“our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.”

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM.

"He went out not knowing whither he went."

HEBREWS xi. 9.

FEW occurrences in history strike the imagination more forcibly than do the early migrations of races. Language shows conclusively that the various European peoples, with very few exceptions, are all members of the same Asiatic race which sent out successive streams of emigrants towards the West in periods before the dawn of authentic history. The causes and motives which provoked these early migrations —whether they were in any given case the results of mere restlessness, or the lust of conquest, or the pressure of hunger—can only be a matter of uncertain conjecture. It is, however, beyond question that, at an early stage of human life upon the globe, Asia poured itself into Europe just as in these latter centuries Europe has been pouring itself into America.

Like other Western races the people whom we find at the beginning of authentic history in Western Palestine looked to the East as their primitive home. In the triangle which the Tigris and the Euphrates form before they combine into one mighty stream, the Jewish people placed the home of their great ancestor Abraham. In this vast triangular plain it is now generally supposed was the primitive Ur of the Chaldees, perhaps even the still more primitive garden of Eden.

“It was a dense and humid plain,” we are told, “where the tropical steam went up like a mist and came down in dews that watered the face of the ground, where the earth seemed to bring forth of herself dense and rank harvests. There the arts, music and building had their birthplace. There men are supposed to have made their first trustworthy observations upon the stars. Below, but a little way, was the Indian Ocean, and above, the great river came down bearing upon its bosom the produce of the plain and the hills.” *

From this rich and favoured region the Jews believe that their ancestor Abraham went out.

* A. B. Davidson, *Called of God.*

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They traced his steps from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran, and from Haran to Damascus, and from Damascus to the land of the Canaanites, until the dark purple ocean, terrible even to his late descendants, lay at his feet and put an imperative limit to his wanderings.

Looking back upon this eventful migration of their ancestor, the later Jewish prophets and historians rightly saw in it more than meets the outward eye. It was the starting-point of that long chain of incidents and experiences which isolated the race of Abraham among nations and imposed upon it its great religious mission. To outward appearance the mere migration of a family, it was at the same time the beginning of religious history. Abraham, as he stepped westwards, was the minister of the loftiest of destinies. "In him," although he knew it not, "all the nations of the earth were to be blessed."

Thus he stood in the remembrance of his descendants as the prototype of faith. God, in pursuance of His beneficent purposes towards mankind, had summoned the patriarch to leave his country and his kindred, and Abraham had obeyed the call. He had gone out, not

knowing precisely where he should find the permanent home he was in search of. He had journeyed on, until he was stopped by the sea. And even when he had reached the land which was eventually to be the territory of his descendants, still his wanderings were not at an end. He did not at once get possession of the land. Indeed, he never got possession of it. He died, unable to call any portion of it his own, except the piece of ground he had bought to bury his dead. Yet he never doubted that he had done well to leave his country, and that God had really called him. He might have gone back had he been so minded. He remained to the end, convinced that he had not followed a deceptive light, and this hope, although apparently unfulfilled, was really justified. The city he sought for was not a mere city in cloudland, a vision which ~~rose~~ up before him and then faded away. It was a city with secure foundations, whose builder and maker was God.

Such was the faith of Abraham. We have only to look at it closely, to see how widely it differs from those states of soul to which, in later times, the name of faith has been given.

We are sometimes reproached with having no faith when we strive to avoid our Lord's condemnation of those who begin to build and have not wherewith to finish, who go to war with an antagonist much their superior in strength. Faith is sometimes represented as if it were an assurance which the understanding had had no part in producing, and with which it should not dare to meddle. It is contrasted with the conviction arising from calculation and reasoning, as if those moved by faith never calculated and never reasoned. Or, again, in its intellectual aspects, faith is spoken of in such a way that it is indistinguishable from credulity. The well-known saying, *Crede quia impossibile* I accept the Christian faith because it is impossible—is often taken to mean, I accept it because it is incredible, which would be a meaningless assertion. Whereas its real meaning was, I accept the faith of Christ because this faith is so extraordinary that it would never have occurred to any one to invent it. These accounts of faith misrepresent it chiefly because they deny to the understanding any share in its composition and give it the character of a

supernatural assurance or a blind unreasoning impulse.

Now, we have no reason for thinking that the stress of trial, in the case of Abraham's faith, did not lie at the precise point where it lies for us. His greatest difficulty, we may believe, was to assure himself that it was indeed God who called him. We may think at first that it was a supernatural voice which spoke to him, and that God appeared to him in visible form. There is, however, no real warrant for such a supposition, and it seems to be quite excluded by the Apostle's statement that no man has seen God at any time.

We may safely conclude that Abraham had as much difficulty as we have in our emergencies in determining that the particular prompting of which he was conscious did indeed come to him from God, and that it was not the mere suggestion of his self-will or love of change. Did God really wish him to go or did He not? This was the question he had to answer.

Guided, then, by his history, we may learn what faith is, and mark the enemies by which it is threatened.

In the first place, we must notice the relation of faith to that faculty which we variously describe as the understanding and the judgment and the reason. It is by this we can alone determine at any given moment whether the calls we hear do really come from God, and whether He would have us go or stay, act or forbear. We have no inward voice apart from the understanding to give us this assurance. And if we reject the help of the understanding, and insist upon following instinct or impulse, we are not displaying faith in God, but only recklessness and self-will.

The Apostle's prayer for his converts at Philippi was that their love might abound in knowledge and judgment, so that they might approve the things that were excellent. He wished them to bring their impulses before the bar of knowledge and judgment, there to be put to the question and tried. Impulses which will not submit to this test, which can give no account of themselves, will seldom prove to be worthy of confidence.

There have been famous personages in history, like Alexander the Great, who thought

that they had some mysterious monitor within them, whose behests they were bound to obey, and who spoke to them apart from the understanding. Such persons have sometimes performed memorable achievements and written their names in letters of blood over the face of the earth. More often, perhaps, they have involved themselves and their country in ruin and disaster. For they have only discovered that their monitor was not to be trusted by the calamities into which he led them.

It is the understanding that alone can teach us whether the call is really of God. We have no higher or better interpreter of His will than our own minds. "The more I read," says a homely teacher, "the more plain it seems to me that people go wrong almost as much from want of sense as from want of honesty; it is very often hard to say whether the men who have done the very worst things have been more deficient in integrity or in understanding." "They found it hard to make their own business pay which they knew something about; and they went into schemes for working mines in South America,

or speculated in cotton and opium. They had a heavy balance on the wrong side one Christmas, and they went on a little more recklessly for twelve months, hoping that by some miracle it would get right, and when the next Christmas came they thought it would be better to have no balance sheet at all."* There can be no faith in God where His truest interpreter is thus repudiated.

Yet we must not ask to have the whole way made plain to us before we set out. Abraham, we read, went out, not knowing whither he went. He knew that his course lay towards the west, and not towards the east or the north or the south. But he did not know how his journey was to end. No vision of the Promised Land had been granted to him beforehand. He had satisfied himself that God called him, and he went out, facing the dangers and uncertainties which he might foresee would lie in his way.

This is the courage of faith. We are prepared to run the risk of postponement and failure. We do not ask that each step of the way shall be made plain to us before we will

* Dale, *Weekday Sermons*.

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM 33

venture, or that our wages shall be paid to us in advance. There is an excessive caution which makes men afraid to commit themselves until they know that success is assured, which urges them to expose others to dangers and risks that they will not face themselves. They will hardly even dare to express an opinion until they know that it has some chance of general approval. Such persons are sometimes described as "safe" men. They are really sources of danger to the institutions with which they are connected, because they are the enemies of all progress, chilling every generous and heroic impulse. We must not ask that the future shall disclose to us its secrets before we set out. We must go like Abraham, sometimes not clearly knowing whither we are going, knowing only that God has called us, and that the same stars are overhead to guide us which shone upon us at home.

Finally, we may learn from Abraham that faith often shows itself amidst the wanderings and vicissitudes of life by nothing more plainly than by persistence. He who has faith in God works and waits in patience until at length

the time of reaping comes. This is well expressed in a letter recently published which an eminent American physician* addressed to a younger brother who was also qualifying himself for the medical profession. "I will not conceal from you," the writer said, "that there is much before you to make even a strong resolution waver. You must toil for years to fit you for the guardianship of the health and lives of men; and yet again you must toil long and diligently to reap the reward of your labour. But if you have that only ambition which is not a vice—to excel others in doing good—then you will not be disappointed. You will be richly repaid for your days of labour and your nights of watching. You will learn to cultivate a spirit of charity towards others and of justice towards yourself, which will make your station in life respected and your social and domestic relations hallowed by the light of an unbroken peace."

Such is the real reward of faith. We may attain the object of our ambition or we may die like Abraham without inheriting the promises. This is of no such mighty

* Osler, *An Alabama Student, and other Essays*.

consequence. The reward of a lifetime is not bestowed by God at the end of a man's pilgrimage. It is bestowed while the pilgrimage is proceeding.

He who takes all needful pains to distinguish the calls of God amidst the many deceptive voices which solicit his ears, who is not disobedient to the heavenly vision, who is courageous and patient, disinterested and industrious, such a man shares the faith by which Abraham saw the day of Christ and was glad. The mark of unworldliness is set upon his life. He declares plainly that he is seeking a better country, even a heavenly one, a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

FAITH IN PERPLEXITY: THE PROPHET JEREMIAH.

“Now the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee ; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee ; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah Lord God ! behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child ; But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child ; for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid because of them, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.”

JER. i. 4.

A GREAT writer who died but a generation ago, yet who seems already to speak to us out of the distant past, Thomas Carlyle, has said that if Adam had remained in Paradise there would have been no anatomy and no metaphysics. He meant that it was pain and sorrow which had caused us to look within and revealed to us the structure of the body and the workings of the mind. We often concur in this opinion, as when we condemn

what we call self-consciousness or introspection, and blame those who scrutinise too closely their own motives and feelings, and are brought at every moment to a standstill by some anxious scruple or misgiving. A little reflection, however, is enough to convince us that in these tendencies there must be good mingled with evil. Self-knowledge is essential to us if we are at all to please God, and thus we cannot think of condemning the process by which alone it can be reached. S. Paul urges us to look within when he says, "Prove yourselves, examine your own selves." Nor was there any human fault which so aroused our Lord's anger as that ignorance of self which He called hypocrisy, and which permitted men to be censorious towards the shortcomings of others while they remained heedless of their own far weightier sins.

That a man may be extremely self-conscious, and yet be capable on an emergency of very strenuous and heroic conduct, appears from the life of the great prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was the most introspective of the prophets of Israel. He was one of those men who do indeed fulfil the task laid upon them,

but who fulfil it at a heavy cost to themselves. They do God's will, but they do not do it easily. The work is accomplished, but it is accomplished in the face of many shrinkings, and at the price of many passionate complaints. It is well that there should be such a person in the Bible to show us that we may do God service while yet the service brings us no present joy or consolation.

Jeremiah was in the distressing position of having none except evil tidings to announce to his people. He lived when the downfall of Jerusalem, before the Babylonian armies, was close at hand, and he had to tell his countrymen that nothing they could do would avert the impending catastrophe. They refused to believe him, and clung obstinately to the hope that the Lord would not forsake the city in which His Temple stood. This Temple was in their eyes the symbol of the Divine Presence, the pledge of the Divine protection. The prophet could not share or countenance these expectations, so he naturally seemed to be wishing for the catastrophe which he foretold so confidently, to be desiring the evil he announced. He appeared to be the enemy of

his country, because he rejected every expedient that was proposed to turn back the invader. Such was the distressing situation in which he stood, the advocate of a policy which looked like the disavowal of all patriotism, the herald of destruction to the city he loved.

Such a situation would have needed a man of iron, and Jeremiah resembled the desert reed shaken by the wind rather than the iron. He was plainly of those men who have difficulty in making up their minds, who see the lions in the way, who perceive the strength of their opponents' case, and who are apt to think that the other course might have been better than the one they actually chose.

Let us study for a few minutes this shrinking, and yet at the same time courageous and heroic prophet.

His sensitiveness appears already in the circumstances of his call to the prophetic office, and continues to show itself through his entire career.

A Jewish prophet heard the Divine call when he became aware of an impulse within him prompting him to go forth and declare

what he believed to be the Divine purposes. The situation of his people enabled him to understand what God intended, or, as we should say, what was about to take place. This knowledge he felt constrained to go out and utter. The inward prompting, or rather compulsion—for it was altogether irresistible—was his call. When we read such a narrative as that of the call of Jeremiah, we naturally suppose that there are two distinct persons speaking. There can be no doubt, however, that the two voices which are holding converse are both within the prophet's own mind.

No sooner had God called Jereniah than another opposing voice also began its pleadings. This was the utterance of his own sense of unfitness for so great and dangerous a mission. The view he took of the political situation was, as I have said, in the highest degree unpopular, because he foretold the national downfall. To make such an announcement in God's name was to come into conflict with his people's most cherished political and religious prejudices, and it required a self-possession and an authority

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which this shrinking, self-distrustful prophet hesitated to claim. So to the Divine call: “I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations,” he makes the objection: “Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child,” meaning not that he was a child in years, but that he had a child’s timidity and want of experience.

It is this sensitiveness and oscillation between opposing convictions which imparts to the life of Jeremiah its peculiar interest and pathos. While the other great prophets of Israel were, as far as we know, visited by no hesitations, or at least conceal any they may have had from our eyes, the mind of Jeremiah appears to have been the scene of a perpetual conflict. We see him regretting that he had ever listened to the prophet’s call, lamenting bitterly that his ministry had been fruitless, cursing his day, and wishing, like Job, that he had never been born. “Woe is me, my mother,” he laments, “that thou hast borne me, a man of strife, and a man of contention to the whole earth. . . . Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable?” and again, “I am in derision daily; everyone mocketh me, cursed be the day wherein I was

born, let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed."

His announcements of impending calamity were received with derision, and yet a force stronger than himself compelled him to utter them. The word of the Lord, when he proclaimed it, was greeted with mockery, and yet if he said, "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name," then there was in his heart, as it were, a burning fire, shut up in his bones, which gave him no rest.

The Book of Jeremiah is thus the revelation of a soul assailed, like that of S. Paul, by continual fightings without and fears within. It is the picture of a man who often doubted whether he was in the right way, and who was only able by an effort of the will to silence his own misgivings, and be true to his best self.

Such pictures are more common now than in Jeremiah's remote age. As knowledge increases self-consciousness increases with it. As we see more clearly the perils that lie around us, the diseases which threaten our bodies, the evil thoughts which assault and

hurt the soul, so we deliberate and hesitate where men used to act instinctively. Reflective habits are generally, and perhaps truly, thought to unfit men for prompt action. The great soldiers and statesmen of the world have frequently owed their successes to the swiftness of their movements. They have been able to take their opponents unprepared, to run some great risk, or accept some heavy responsibility without a moment's delay.

On the other hand the great introspective writers of the world, the men who have communed much with themselves, have seldom succeeded in action.

One of these introspective lives has lately been laid bare before us in the biography of Cardinal Newman, from the time of his reception into the Roman Church until his death. It is the picture of a sensitive, discriminating, balancing mind which could always disengage with wonderful sureness all that was involved in every proposition and every suggested enterprise. But this very readiness to distinguish and to analyse caused him to be distrusted by ordinary men, who are impatient of these refinements and subtleties, and his life

was marked by many failures and disappointments.

Looking further back, we may remember the deep interest aroused by the publication of a journal * in which a gifted man, till then but little known, had been in the habit of recording for his own satisfaction his inmost sentiments and reflections. Many of these are profoundly true and suggestive. In the heart thus exposed to their view many will see their own. But throughout the entire journal there runs the note of conscious, admitted failure. We are reading the confessions of a man who was not able to make any adequate use of his great gifts, who could not satisfy himself or overcome his own misgivings, to whom the vision of an unattainable perfection made the actual task of the hour distasteful. We might be tempted to think that the writer was as the unprofitable servant who, because he had but one talent, went and buried that one in the earth, if we did not remember that perhaps his appointed work was the disclosure of his own weakness.

Let us, then, fix our attention upon two

* *The Journal of Amiel.*

common mistakes into which introspection may readily lead us. It may distort the vision both of the past and the future, causing us to misinterpret both what has been and also what will be. Both these dangers are revealed to us in the life of Jeremiah.

1. First as regards the past. Mere regret over what is irremediable is plainly profitless, and the best refuge from such regret lies in the thought that what has been could not have been otherwise. We often say, had I only known, or could I have foreseen; yes, but we could not know. It is true that our own mistakes and sins have often contributed to our misfortune, but now that that misfortune has actually come to pass it should take its place in our minds among the things which work together for good.

So, too, the highest feeling in the presence of irremediable loss is revealed in the saying: “Weep bitterly over the dead, as he is worthy, and then comfort thyself; drive heaviness away: thou shalt not do him good, but hurt thyself.”

Perhaps the commonest of all forms of regret is regret over the choice of a vocation.

And the best preservative against this lies in the remembrance of the long train of circumstances which have led to it. These reach back to a man's cradle and beyond it. Given his parentage and education, his place in the world naturally follows.

In these shaping circumstances faith recognises the hand of God. To his own apprehensions Jeremiah opposed the thought that God had from his earliest youth called and appointed him. "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest out of the womb I sanctified thee." So to His disciples Christ gave the assurance that it was not they who chose Him but He who chose them. Thus in spite of our mistakes let us still believe that we are where God placed us, and that our negligence or wilfulness has not thwarted His beneficent will.

2. Again, the future often shapes itself amiss to the introspective mind. We may require to be positively assured of succeeding before we begin. We may ask to have all uncertainty removed. We may require to see the path clear and cloudless to the end. These are impracticable demands. The pro-

phet's objection, "Behold I cannot speak, I am a child," was equivalent to saying that he would not take up his task unless he could be assured beforehand that he would be successful. He demanded some pledge that his youth and inexperience should not militate against him.

We must often go out in faith, not knowing whither we are going; we must accept risks, we must be satisfied with probability where we should be glad to have certainty, we must have faith in God, and trust His promise to be with those who honestly try to serve Him.

We conclude, therefore, that there may be those who are really doing God service and obeying His call while yet they have no inward certainty or assurance that this is so. Perhaps, indeed, we read more into that Divine promise, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee," than the words really contain. They may mean only that the Divine help shall not fail us. They do not necessarily mean that we shall always feel its presence. When the three children were seen in the furnace we read that the

onlookers saw a fourth figure with them, but we do not read that this figure was visible to the sufferers themselves.

Human happiness, experience shows us, is never quite complete, something is wanting to every one, even to him whom the world counts the most favoured of all. A man is rich, but a stranger, it may be, shall inherit all that he possesses. He is famous in the world, but he has no joy at home. A noble career opens to him, but health fails, and he must renounce it. Fortune seems to give everything, but yet withholds the one thing which would make all the rest to have any true value. There is the whole row of cyphers, but the one figure before them which would make them express anything is wanting.

And there may be those, like this great prophet, whose trial arises from this, not that God has not richly gifted them, or that they fail to make a right use of His gifts, but that the assurance that they are doing so is denied to them. Regrets and apprehensions hide His face, and deprive them of the joy of His presence.

If there are any here who recognise themselves in the picture thus held up before them, let them learn from Jeremiah that though their own heart should condemn, yet God is greater than their heart, and knoweth all things. “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant? He that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God.”

THE LAST ACT OF FAITH.*

"No one taketh (my life) it away from me, I lay it down of myself." S. JOHN x. 18.

It has been the belief of Christians in all ages that the Eternal and Unseen Being in whom we all live and move, did verily and indeed reveal Himself to men in the person of Him who died, as on this day, upon the Cross.

When we allow our minds to dwell upon such a revelation, we can conceive of two distinct forms that it might have assumed.

It might have pleased God that the being in whom He revealed His likeness should be man only in name, that he should not act and think and feel as ordinary men do, that he should only be apparently, and not really, shut in within the limitations of humanity. If this had been the form assumed by the

* Preached on Good Friday.

Incarnation, then we should see in the Lord Jesus one who was man in appearance, but who was in reality a being of a different order from ourselves, and who hid for a brief space His real nature under a human form. Such a conception of the Incarnation would deprive the life of Christ of all its power as an example. It has been repeatedly put forward as an account of the Incarnation, but it has as often been decisively repudiated by the Church.

On the other hand, God might reveal Himself to us in a life which should be at all points like our own except for its perfect obedience to the Divine will, in a being from whom the future would be hidden, even as it is from us, and who would thus be a prey, even as we are, to all the feelings inseparable from this darkness—to surprise, and disappointment, and grief, and amazement.

Such we know was the Lord Jesus. Repeatedly we hear of Him marvelling and grieving, and find Him wishing for some other issue than the one which had actually come to pass, as when He lamented the blindness of Jerusalem during its day of opportunity.

It is, however, when we contemplate the closing scenes of His ministry that we need most to remember His complete humanity. We must suppose that a violent death, notwithstanding His perfect obedience, was still to His imagination the painful and terrible thing it is to ourselves. He was "amazed" and "troubled" and "exceeding sorrowful" at the near prospect of what actually took place. He felt to the full the sting of death. Not only did He really die. He also saw death coming, and shrank from its approach.

Yet, oppressed by this shrinking, He resolved that He would die. It is here we often deprive ourselves of the consolation to be found in His death by our unwillingness to accept simply what the gospels tell us. They tell us that He did more than refuse to escape death. They assure us that He deliberately sought it, that He went up to Jerusalem intending to die.

The distinction between the acceptance of death in the discharge of duty and the deliberate resolve to die is real and important. It may be illustrated by a tragic death which is still vividly remembered. General

Gordon went out to the African desert hoping to be able, by his influence over the Arabs, to secure the unmolested retreat of the Egyptian garrisons imprisoned within those inhospitable wastes. He failed, but refused to return, even when it had become almost certain that death would be the consequence of his refusal. He accepted death in the discharge of duty. He was like the surgeon who sacrifices his own life to save that of the poor waif brought in from the city's streets into the hospital.

Noble, however, though such a surrender be, there would appear to be a step even beyond it. A man in health and security might deliberately embark upon an enterprise in which he saw his own death to be certainly involved. He might contemplate his death as an incident essential to the success of some mission which none the less he deliberately undertook.

It is in this last form the gospels represent to us Christ's sacrifice of Himself. Death was not merely accepted by Him. It was deliberately chosen. "Behold," He said to His disciples, "we go up to Jerusalem; and the

Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death."

The reason of this momentous choice the gospels also make quite plain. He told His disciples that He came to give His life "a ransom for many." He spoke at the last supper of the "many" for whom His blood was about to be shed. We infer from these and other passages that He died in order to bring the blind and careless nation to God, to prepare a people in whose midst the Divine kingdom could be established, and God's will would be perfectly done. At present the nation was not ready for the heavenly kingdom. His desire was that His death should bring about a revulsion of feeling among His people, such as takes place when we see at length the real character of one whom we have grievously misjudged.

So the death of Christ was an atoning death. Its object was to reconcile men to a Father whom they had well nigh forgotten. The atonement was not a mere legal or mechanical transaction. Its purpose was not to divert the Father's anger or to appease His sense of justice. He did not need any such propitia-

tion, for He had always been gracious, slow to anger, and ready to receive the penitent.

Our Lord laid down His life, not to change the Father's mind, but to save His brethren, to gather them together in love and obedience round the Father's footstool.

In this sense, therefore, I understand the saying: "No one taketh my life away from me; I lay it down of myself."

His obedience reached even unto death. He was not merely waiting for God's call; He went forth to meet Him. He made the prophet's answer, "Here am I; send me."

So surely our own highest prerogative is laid bare, and a great lesson is taught us.

For we are lifted above the earth when we realise that we each possess this power, although we may never be called upon to use it, of voluntarily surrendering life in obedience to a Divine call. The knowledge that we have such a power gives us a sense of freedom, and arms us with courage. If it is possible for us to part with life, it is possible to part with everything else. If God bestows such a privilege upon us, then He does us pre-eminent honour, and raises us far above the

rest of His creatures. They may indeed go impulsively where they will certainly find death. They may rush into the flames or throw themselves upon the spears of their enemies. Man alone deliberately seeks death when God calls. He alone really chooses to die.

This is the source of that feeling of emancipation of which we are all conscious whenever we hear of the voluntary sacrifice of life at the call of duty. We are glad to be reminded that such a sacrifice is within our own power, although it is never likely to be required of us.

Thus as we read of the great Florentine reformer of the fifteenth century, blame mingles in our minds with praise. Savonarola made the mistake of becoming a secular politician. He associated his desire for the Church's reform with the triumph of a particular political policy. The policy he advocated failed, and he was involved in its ruin. Yet he did deliberately lay down his life at God's bidding. The place he claimed beside his Master in one of his last sermons was really his :

“I was in a safe haven,” he said, “the life of a friar, but the Lord drove my bark into the open sea. Before me on the vast ocean I see terrible tempests brewing. Behind, I have lost sight of my haven. I communed last night with the Lord and said, ‘Pity me; lead me back to my haven.’ ‘It is impossible; see you not that the wind is contrary?’ ‘But, Lord, I am not sufficient for these things.’ ‘Knowest thou not that God chooses the weak of this world to confound the mighty? Thou art the instrument, I am the doer.’ Then was I convinced, and cried ‘Lord, I will do Thy Will, but tell me what shall be my reward?’ ‘Eye hath not seen nor ear heard.’ ‘But in this life, Lord?’ ‘My son, the servant is not above his Master. The Jews made me die on the Cross: a like lot awaits thee.’ ‘Yea, Lord, let me die as Thou didst die for me.’ Then He said, ‘Wait yet a little while: let that be done which must be done, then arm thyself with courage.’”*

So in days much nearer to our own, a teacher of whom a competent judge† affirmed that when everything had been said that could be

* Villari, *Life of Savonarola.*

† Morley, *Essays.*

said in the way of criticism, he had done more to elevate and purify our ideals of life than any English writer of the last century—I mean Thomas Carlyle—traced back his recovery from that despondency and apathy by which sensitive minds are often visited, to this consciousness that he could even surrender life, if such a surrender were required of him.

“Death? Well, death.” So he communed with himself. “Hast thou not a heart; canst thou not suffer whatsoever it be? And as I so thought, there rushed like a stream of fire over my whole soul; and I shook base fear away from me for ever. It is from this hour that I incline to date my spiritual new-birth; perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a man.”*

So the knowledge that we have the power to lay down our lives may bring to us all freedom and consolation and peace.

It may impart to us a sense of freedom because it assures us that the power of outward things upon us is less great than it seems. Our happiness often appears to us

**Sartor Resartus*.

to depend on things we have now, but which we may lose; or to arise out of some situation in which we now find ourselves, but from which we may be driven. We say to ourselves, What would become of me were I to be deprived of this or that support upon which I now lean so heavily? Could I ever survive this or that calamity? Yes, we may reply, we could survive it. We have the power to part, not only with this or that source of joy, but with the possession in which all others are included. If we can lay life itself down, we can make every other surrender. A being who can make voluntary choice of death can make every sacrifice which God may ask from him. He need not fear that his strength will ever be unequal to what the day brings.

Again, this assurance brings us consolation because it whispers to us that life may not be of such great price in God's eyes as it is of necessity in ours, since He so often calls upon those He loves to lay it down. We all cling, rightly and necessarily clinging, to life, and we draw back when death comes near. Yet if the Most High has some purpose to accomplish,

human life does not seem to count for much in His eyes. He strews the sea-shore with the bodies of the dead as if they were pieces of seaweed. He shakes the earth and involves multitudes in one common destruction. I do not mean that such reflections should make life seem less precious. I mean only that they should teach us that, precious though it be, there are obviously other things which in God's eyes possess still higher value.

And the knowledge may bring us peace, because we must so often feel that we are unprofitable stewards, that we are doing less than we might do, or that self-will and vanity mingle with our purest intentions, or again, that our powers are not fully called into exercise by our present situation.

We may dismiss these self-reproaches if our hearts assure us that death itself would be preferable to a deliberate abandonment of duty, or a wilful disregard of conscience. The clearest proof of disinterestedness is a voluntary death. And if we feel within ourselves the willingness to offer such a proof, then we may feel sure that, in spite of all our failures, we have not forfeited the love of God.

But it may be urged that the feelings of the heart are often deceptive, and that we might have such an assurance and still not be able to stand fast in the stress of temptation. I know it well, but I do not think that if we expose the counsels of our hearts here, on this day, before the all-seeing eye of God, we shall find them really untrustworthy ; and this is the reason why. I would suggest this subject as one on which we may each examine ourselves. If we really find that life itself counts with us for less than obedience to the Divine will, that death would be preferable to the deliberate acquiescence in falsehood or imposture or injustice, then we may confidently hope that we have fellowship with Christ, and that the Father's love does really rest upon us.

II. FAITH IN CHRIST

THE ETERNAL WORD.*

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” S. JOHN i. 1.

A WORD, as we understand it, is a spoken utterance. It is an articulate and significant sound breaking the silence and falling upon the ear. The word, however, obviously exists in the speaker's mind before he utters it. He first thinks and then he speaks. The thing he wishes to convey is present to him before he expresses it.

So this sublime chapter represents to us the Eternal Being whom no man has seen at any time holding converse through long ages with the creatures He has made. In the very beginning, the writer tells us, there was that in the Divine nature which corresponds to the human reason, something which moved the mind of man and attracted it, and led to a

* Preached on Christmas Day.

converse or communication between earth and heaven.

This something he calls the Word. How he came to give it this designation we cannot rightly tell. The Old Testament speaks repeatedly of a Word of the Lord which came to the prophets. Perhaps the writer followed these communications up to their source in the heavens, and so reached this important feature of the Divine nature.

In any case he leaves us in no doubt what the result of the communication was when it reached the earth. It was as light illuminating men's minds and teaching them how God would have them live. Comparatively few of them, however, he goes on to say, received the communication or turned it to any good account. For some reason it did not penetrate into their minds or take possession of them. Even the race who might have been expected to welcome and profit by it, did not in actual fact do so to any considerable extent. Even they did not receive the light or learn the secret. A certain number of men, however, scattered over the earth did hear the word and did learn the secret. Why they

in particular should have learned it, and their neighbours should not, is to us inexplicable. Other men had the very same opportunities, but to them they came in vain. It is the very familiar experience that the ear hears only what it is able to hear. We cannot further account for this experience. We can only mark and register it.

In any case a certain number did receive the communication and took it to heart. They were not confined to one country or race. They had their representatives in all countries and all races, heathen who without the law yet did the things according to the law, good men of whom the world was not worthy, who shone as lights in dark places, Christians before Christ came. Their lives cannot be fully explained by natural processes. No one can tell why they should have appeared where they did appear, or why there should have been as many of them as there actually were and no more. They were "born," says our writer, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Now, so far you will observe we have been following the invisible and secret intercourse

which takes place between the Eternal Being and the heart of man. The intercourse has no witnesses, can have none. It may result in a certain fashion of life, but it has no other outward token or evidence. The path it follows is one which no fowl knoweth, and the vulture's eye has not seen.

At a certain moment of time, however, our chapter goes on to say, it pleased God to speak with greater distinctness and emphasis. He spoke through the medium of a human life. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." This utterance of the continuous and never-ending speech of the Eternal God to the soul of man is what we commemorate to-day. We hear the speech, which was from the beginning, shaping itself into the prattlings of a child.

Gradually the child grows to manhood. About His early years history is almost silent. Subsequent annalists could recover but little of what they contained. At length He appears in public and makes claims such as no prophet before Him had made. He identifies Himself in dark and yet, as it would seem, unmistakable language with the mysterious

personage of whom the poets and seers of Israel had dreamed, and in whom they saw the fortunes of their race embodied. Still, in spite of these unusual features of His teaching He remained to the end in the eyes of His contemporaries the prophet of Nazareth, the son of Mary and Joseph, whose brethren they knew.

He soon awakened the distrust and hatred of the religious leaders of His people, and suffered a violent and ignominious death.

It is at this point that His history begins to transcend ordinary experience. For we should have expected that after His work had thus been stamped with the impress of failure, and He had passed away from the earth, His remembrance would quickly fade out of the minds of His disciples, and they would think of Him less and less as the years and the centuries passed.

Nothing of the kind takes place. Brief though His ministry had been, His work displays amazing vitality. He becomes the starting-point of a movement to which history presents no parallel. He gathers together a great company, who call themselves by

His Name, and to whom His authority is supreme.

Here, however, a momentous question calls imperatively for an answer. Some one may say: "Yes, the story is a marvellous one. There is nothing like it in the annals of humanity. Christmas Day does stand quite alone among days. Still the history, marvellous though it be, is the record of a human life and its immense results. What perplexes us and causes us to stumble is the Church's identification of this man, unique though He was, with God, whom no man hath seen or can see. We cannot see in what sense the Word, as a title of Jesus of Nazareth, can be truly said to have been God."

My reply would be: Your difficulty, I believe, arises from a misunderstanding of language. Read carefully the passages in the New Testament where this great identification is made and you will see that they all speak of God in His relation to men, His love toward them, His desire to serve and to bless them. He is not here contemplated as He is in Himself, dwelling in light unapproachable, but as He steps forth from His secret dwelling-place,

and intervenes in human affairs. Thinking thus of Him Christian devotion identified Him completely with Christ Jesus. It said that God Himself had appeared bringing salvation to all men, that He had purchased for Himself a Church with His own blood, that He had suffered, died, and risen. This language presents to me no difficulty. It would indeed embarrass me if I forgot that God was Spirit, and that we are all partakers of the Divine nature. If He spoke by His Son He spoke also in old time by the prophets. If He dwelt in Christ in all His fulness we have Christ's own assurance that He may dwell in us if we only give ear to His promptings.

So the speech which the Eternal Being had been uttering in the hearing of men from the very beginning at last found this articulate voice. The man Jesus Christ gave it distinct expression.

And what was the message which He brought from the bosom of eternity and delivered to as many as were able to hear it? Did He tell them about the world He had left, describe the gorgeous palace from which He had issued in order to visit this troubled

earth? Such information, if we think of it, would have been of but little use to them. It would only have made them wish to get away from the earth and exchange its chequered experiences for the peace of the eternal world.

No. Our chapter sums up the message in two words which keep sounding in our ears through the gospel that follows. The first of these words is *Light*. "This is the message," our writer in another place tells us, "which we have heard from Christ and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

We may say: "What great significance is there in this? Who has ever doubted, or can doubt, such a statement?" The answer must be that mankind have persistently doubted it, and that a large part of their misery has followed from this precise source. For they have made to themselves gods after their own likeness, cruel, vindictive, immoral gods, and have proceeded to worship them and to carry out what they supposed to be their will. The result has been terror and despair and bloodshed and ruin, evil mistaken for good, and

good for evil, darkness put for light, and light for darkness, bitter put for sweet, and sweet for bitter.

If we may trace the sufferings of the human race to any one spiritual source we should look for their fountain here, in the supposition that there was darkness in God, and that they could serve Him by cruelties and oppressions, or that He would at least overlook their misdeeds towards each other if they were only diligent to tread His courts and offer Him the appointed oblations.

Nor is it easy for any of us, however emancipated we are from such superstitions, to believe that He is light, and that in Him is no darkness at all. For we often need to trust Him farther than we can see. He seems heedless of our sufferings. He leaves our most earnest prayers unanswered. We do not always see His justice vindicated within the short term of our lives. We must admit that He has not here given us evidence so constraining that doubt is impossible. We walk by faith and not by sight. Still the more firmly we hold the belief that the shadows which now rest upon His love and

wisdom are of our creation and not His, the better and happier we are. The belief justifies itself by its fruits.

The other word is *Life*. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. Repeated attempts have been made throughout the Church's history to resolve Christianity into knowledge, the assumption being that knowledge must of itself regenerate human life, that an enlightened mind must of necessity issue in noble and unselfish conduct. History proves this assumption to be a mistaken one. Knowledge does not appear of itself able to regenerate humanity. It may easily give rise to intellectual pride, and so prove a separating barrier, shutting men up within their own narrow circle and keeping them apart from their fellow-creatures.

The invariable result of these attempts to resolve Christianity into knowledge has been to form groups of persons like the Pharisees of old, who trusted in themselves that they were enlightened and righteous and despised others.

Therefore to the word Light, we must add the word Life. We must by no means allow

our faith to evaporate in sentiments and professions. We must translate it into life. And we must do this without delay. If there is any duty, long neglected, calling us, any long-standing reparation to be made, any evil habit to be abandoned, any good practice to be begun, let us be sure that if we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in the darkness we lie and do not the truth, but if we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin.

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

“And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in the Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him: and a voice came out of the heavens, Thou art my beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased.”

S. MARK i. 9, 10, 11.

I WISH to speak this evening upon the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. It is a difficult subject, not because there is any doubt as to the Church’s meaning, but because it obliges us to do what we would fain avoid — to enter into the recesses of our Lord’s personality. Yet we cannot avoid the subject. There is none upon which we of the clergy are more often questioned, or upon which there is greater need of reverent, sober, and honest thought. I ask you for your patient attention; and beg you to believe that I speak with a deep sense of responsibility.

It was only when Christ had passed away from the earth that men began to think of His Divinity. During the days of His ministry He walked about, a man among men. No halo encompassed His head. His doings and words were wonderful indeed, but not super-human. He seemed to stand in the succession of the prophets. Even to the multitudes who acclaimed Him on His last entry into the city He was still the prophet of Nazareth in Galilee.

As years passed the dimensions of His work increased, even as the great mountains seem to touch the sky when we leave them behind us and turn to look at them afar off. He appeared as the author of a movement destined to reach to the ends of the earth, the reconciler of a divided humanity, the founder of an eternal kingdom. His disciples were penetrated by the conviction that in Him God the Saviour had indeed shown Himself to men.

At first they did not stop to ask Him how. Enthusiasm and devotion ask no questions, and are troubled by no difficulties. It was enough for Christians of the first age that the "grace of God had indeed appeared instructing them to live soberly, righteously and godly in

this present world," and to look to the future for a fuller revelation of their "great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

Gradually and inevitably reflection began. Jesus Christ was man, and yet He was God also, for in Him God had manifestly intervened to save a sinful world. How was this union to be conceived? How much was human, how much was Divine in Jesus of Nazareth?

Now, in the early history of the Church we find two explanations offered of this great mystery. And here I cannot but be reminded of an observation which we often hear. It is said that doctrinal sermons are very distasteful and unwelcome to modern congregations. And the opinion does, I confess, accord with my own experience. But I believe that the distaste arises almost entirely from the fact that the doctrines dealt with, or the form given to them, do not appear to have any connection with human life or human experience. They seem to belong to a world of which we can know nothing. We do not feel ourselves in a position either to affirm or to deny them. We cannot see how they really matter. I hope,

then, to be able to show that the two explanations of which I am about to speak are not open to these charges. They do not belong to a remote and inaccessible world. There is nothing in either of them incomprehensible. The question with regard to them is simply which of the two best accords with the facts before us.

First, then, it was thought that this mysterious union could be best explained by what was called adoptionism, the view that God had adopted Jesus as His son, just as we might adopt a child to bear our name and inherit our wealth. And the moment of adoption was taken by these early theologians to be the moment of baptism, when the Divine Spirit descended and the voice came out of the heavens, Thou art my beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased. Previously it was supposed there had been no exceptional consciousness or endowment. Now at a particular moment the ineffable union was formed. The power descended and filled the human organism with strength and glory.

What shall we say to this opinion? It seems at first sight to have much in its

favour. There is much in infancy, much, too, in boyhood which may seem to our minds incompatible with Divinity. Do what we will we find it hard to associate the Eternal Being with human childhood, beautiful though childhood may be. We cannot hold the two thoughts in our mind at once. One pushes the other out. Thus it may seem easier to believe that the Divinity of Christ began with His public ministry, that the Spirit now for the first time descended upon Him and endowed Him with its manifold gifts.

In truth, however, the view, plausible though it may appear, proves to be utterly untenable. It obliges us to make a supposition to which our records are altogether opposed. It constrains us, so to speak, to cut our Lord's life in two, and to represent the period before the baptism as unlike in kind to the period which followed it. This we feel to be quite inadmissible. For one thing, it would deprive the life of Christ of all likeness to our own. It would cease to be human. For in our case one period of life forms the foundation on which the next rests. The child is father of the man. Our days are the heritors of days gone by.

Thus we dismiss this explanation, as the Church's consciousness did when it perceived what was involved, and we turn to the only alternative.

This is the belief that there was no rent or break in our Lord's life, that He grew, as the gospel tells us, in wisdom and stature and favour with God and man. In other words, we believe that that intimate union which made Him say, "I and my Father are One," had been already created when He lay in His cradle. Each year, indeed, as it passed strengthened and cemented it. Still the Divine Spirit had already descended, and was informing the human mind when the child opened His eyes upon the world.

How then are we to understand the descent of the Spirit at the moment of Baptism, and the voice from heaven with its solemn proclamation. What the narrative appears to shadow forth is this :

In a remote village in Galilee for well nigh thirty summers and winters, a child had been passing through boyhood to manhood. That marvellous thing, a human spirit, had been unfolding its beauty and its strength. It had

not reached maturity unwatched and uncared for. It had been guarded by the love of parents. It had been trained and disciplined by the best education then available. The earth and the sky had spoken to it their silent messages. Whenever, too, the boy climbed the hill that looked down upon Nazareth, a scene rich in memories of the past would lie before Him, and would, we may feel sure, call up its associations in His mind. So the summers and winters passed until nearly thirty of them had been told.

Within the mind so placed a momentous conviction had arisen and slowly grown to maturity. This belief was that a great spiritual catastrophe or revolution was immediately at hand, that that day of the Lord foretold by so many prophets—a day of account for the past, but also a day bright with hope and promise—was on the very point of appearing, that the Kingdom of God was at hand.

This consummation He represented, when He spoke of it, under forms of sense and time. His hearers could not rightly tell how

far His conceptions of this Divine Kingdom differed from theirs. I do not mean by this that He practised the arts of accommodation. I believe that He spoke as He thought. For in becoming man He had subjected Himself to the limitations of humanity.

In all His language which has come down to us we notice invariably that the forms of expression, as well as the ideas, are cast in the mould, not of our age but of His. He spoke through His contemporaries to us. He moved all coming time through His own generation. The most remarkable instance of this is the one we have just been considering. When His immediate listeners heard Him speak of the kingdom of God they no doubt understood Him to mean a commonwealth set up on the earth under God's immediate government. He never formally disabused their minds of these ideas, of whose inadequacy He must often have been aware. He left the future to show what the kingdom would be.

So in the same way we find Him adopting silently the assumptions of His contemporaries regarding the origin of many bodily and mental diseases. If, as we may reasonably suppose,

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many of the ailments then ascribed to demoniac possession were the same as those which we now call nervous or mental maladies, then here also we find Him using the speech of His time. Had He been living to-day He would beyond doubt have adopted a different phraseology.

Yet another instance of the same limitation may be seen in His employment of the current Jewish images to describe the penalties and rewards of the life to come. He spoke of Gehenna and Paradise and Abraham's bosom, figures familiar to His immediate listeners but strange to us.

This acceptance of a human form, and with it the speech and the conceptions of a particular age, was what S. Paul meant by His self-emptying. Such emptying seems to us essential to our Lord's humanity. Without it He would have been man only in appearance.

Shall it be said that this inevitably weakens the authority of His words, and deprives them of permanent validity? We may reply that He wished the authority of His words to rest upon the assent they would find in the minds and consciences of His hearers. "I

came," He said, "to bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." His favourite expression was verily. "Verily, verily, I say unto you," *i.e.* "I speak to you in the name of truth." "It is in your devotion to truth I desire to find the support of my words."

The conviction, however, that the kingdom of God was at hand was not the only fruit of these thirty unrecorded years. Growing up with His mind as it grew, and becoming stronger with its strength, there came to maturity a conviction such as had never before taken possession of any son of man. That belief was nothing less than this: "It is upon Me and upon no other the task has been imposed of winding up the old order and introducing the new. I am indeed to all outward seeming unequal to the great task. I stand in a humble place. I am unprivileged, defenceless. Arrayed against Me is the authority, the power of this world. Yet stronger than these antagonists is the assurance that the Father is with Me, that I am charged with His behests, the executant of His purposes."

What, then, should we have seen had we

stood by the Jordan as Jesus came up out of the water? With the eye of flesh we should have seen nothing but the silent heavens and the river flowing onwards through the thick sedge to the sea. With the ear we should have heard nothing except the sighing of the wind in the reeds. None the less we should have been standing at one of the turning-points of human affairs. We should have been near, in body at least, to an experience which is so entirely without a parallel that we have nothing to which we can liken it, and so can hardly conceive or represent it. For at that moment the Divine ratification of this awful conviction of which I have been speaking was given: "Jesus coming up out of the water saw the heavens rent asunder and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him, and a voice came out of the heavens, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased."

So the assurance which had slowly and gradually been formed within the mind of Jesus was ratified and confirmed. From that moment onwards it never, as far as we know, wavered, except, perhaps, for an instant under the sharp pressure of the pains of death. It

was assailed immediately afterwards in the wilderness by the three promptings of Satan. The suggestion of the Tempter was that our Lord, if He were really the Divine Son, must either assert His Sonship by marvels, or make some other forbidden compromise with the sinister forces to which the world appeared to be in subjection. The assurance was subsequently threatened by almost every hostile experience to which it could possibly be exposed,—by isolation and the want of all human sympathy, by disappointment and apparently irretrievable failure. Yet it remained unshaken to the very end, showing itself by such unpremeditated utterances as “the cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it,” “this cup is the new covenant in my blood,” and at last “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.”

And what does the great occurrence teach us? What may we learn from it that will help us in the emergencies of everyday life?

We learn then, above all, the great lesson of faith—the courage to go on where our duty seems to point, although the way is threatening and the obstacles are many, and we say,

“Who am I that I should do this great thing?” If we honestly endeavour to learn what the right course is we should go forward, trusting that God will enable us to fulfil the task He has laid upon us. We should not have perceived the duty, or seen its beckoning hand, if it had not been intended for us.

The baptism of Jesus was one of those manifestations of God to men which have given the Epiphany season its name. For the word Epiphany the Greek Church substitutes the more explicit word Theophany. The name means, I need hardly say, Manifestation, and it is intended to remind us of all those various revelations of the Divine love and wisdom which we see in the life of Christ and which we do not otherwise commemorate. As we follow His footsteps and listen to Him and watch Him, so we see, as it were, again and again the heavens opened and the unseen God becoming visible to us in the person of His well-beloved Son.

Now, Christ is to faith the representative of humanity. He is what we hope humanity may be, but what it is not yet. And this experience of His, unique though it be, has its

fainter likeness within our own minds. When we are moved by the sense of some human need—a spiritual or a social or an intellectual need—and step forward to lift up the burden or to venture upon the perilous pathway—then sometimes in glad and happy emotion, but more often in the imperative sense of obligation, we receive the assurance of the Divine favour, and hear the call to go forward armed with the faith and the patience of Christ.

THE SCHOOLING OF THE DIVINE SON.

“Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered ; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation.” HEBREWS v. 7.

ONE of the most fruitful of all religious studies is the study of the symbolism of Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation we are in the midst of images, metaphors, symbols, which too often we pass heedlessly by, or—worse still perhaps—mistake for concrete realities.

— A symbol may be defined as a representation which does not aim at being a reproduction or exact likeness. It is not a copy or photograph of the thing represented. It only suggests its antitype by certain features which they both have in common. Thus the sickle by calling up the thought of reaping has become the recognised symbol of the harvest.

The scales are the symbol of justice. The ring is the symbol of marriage. Kneeling is the symbol of prayer.

The commonest objects may be thus transfigured and ennobled by becoming the equivalents of human convictions and sentiments. The piece of cloth which we might discard as a rag may be made to sum up the feelings and aspirations awakened by home and country. The two crossed bars suggest to millions the redemption of a lost world.

Still more significant is the symbolism of language. We do not know until we examine our ordinary speech with the thought in our minds how greatly it is woven of metaphors and symbols. We speak of an idea "passing" through our heads, of our hearts being "weighed down" by sadness or "uplifted" by joy, of our minds being the "prey" of remorse or regret, of prayer "ascending" to the Throne of the heavenly Grace, and in each of these cases we are using a material image to represent a spiritual state. And in proportion as language becomes more elevated and impassioned, passing from the speech of everyday life into that of rhetoric and poetry,

so it becomes more conspicuously symbolical. When Cain kills his brother, in the Book of Genesis the blood of the murdered man is said to take a voice, and "cry aloud" from the ground. The Psalmist represents the heavens as "declaring" the glory of God. The Prophet denouncing the covetous, makes their houses speak and tell of the iniquity and cruelty which built them. "The stone shall cry out of the wall and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." And our Lord riding across the stony ridge of the Mount of Olives towards Jerusalem declared that the stones would take up His praises if the voices of the people should fail. "I tell you that if these should hold their peace the stones would immediately cry out."

These are instances—and I might easily multiply them—of the way in which feeling as it rises in intensity finds vent for itself increasingly in figure and symbol. Hence the whole religious language of mankind, expressing as it does the highest and strongest human emotion, is markedly and persistently symbolical. Our prayers, our, hymns, our creeds, even the most formal statements of the

faith, are all cast in the language of symbol. They convey eternal realities under forms of sense and time. We speak of our Lord "returning" to that Father from whom He had never been absent, of His "ascending" to a heaven which, He declared, had been uninterruptedly His home, of His "sitting at the right hand" of One who has neither body, parts nor passions, and thus, by these manifest inconsistencies, we declare that we are only approximating to realities which none the less we are compelled to represent.

The subject is a vast and a deeply instructive one. I know of none more so in the sphere of religion. Of the many reflections to which we might allow it to lead us, I will confine myself to one which is at once very obvious and very fundamental. We need no deep observation to perceive that symbols come in time to require an interpreter. They become like a language which has ceased to be spoken. This is because men derive their symbols from their own age. The symbol is suggested to them by some event which has happened once in time, or by an association with which an object may at one time be

invested, but of which it may afterwards be stripped. The world may thus move away from the symbol. Generations may arise to whom it needs to be explained.

Precious stones are still prized for their beauty. They are coveted oftener, we may believe, because they indicate the possession of wealth. Yet the gold and precious stones of the Apocalypse are to us very inadequate symbols of the felicity which the eye has not seen, but which God has prepared for those who love Him. Again, I have spoken of the symbolism of the Cross. How various are the messages which it has on different occasions conveyed to the heart and soul of man ! Horror, veneration, love, hatred, hope, fear, have in turn been whispered into the ear and the soul by the lifeless wood. The same Cross has revealed to men the depths of shame and the heights of honour. It has been kissed by dying lips and spat upon. It has been laid upon the breast of the dead as their sole ground of hope, and it has been burned as if it were something unclean.

“On the whole,” a great writer* has said,

* Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*.

“as Time adds much to the sacredness of symbols, so likewise in his progress he at length defaces or even desecrates them; and symbols, like all terrestrial garments, wax old.... For all things, even celestial luminaries, much more atmospheric meteors, have their rise, their culmination, their decline.”

From this fact there issues the truth upon which I would dwell and the lesson I would teach.

The greatest of all Christian symbols is that of sonship. The image which the Gospel invokes to represent the relationship of God to men is that of parental love. He upon whom our faith rests was God’s well-beloved Son. To all who receive Him He gives the right to become children of God.

This symbol stands at the centre of all Christian faith and practice. It presents itself to us whenever we listen to our Lord and His Apostles. He habitually spoke of His Father in heaven and He taught His disciples likewise to use this tender designation. The word was ever on His lips “My Father worketh hitherto and I work,” “The cup that My Father hath given Me shall I not drink it,”

“Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit,” “I ascend to My Father and your Father,” so we hear Him speak as we follow the course of His life. And this relationship He did not reserve for Himself, He freely allowed His disciples to share in it. “When ye pray,” He taught them, say “Our Father which art in heaven.” “Be ye perfect,” He enjoined them, “as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Thus the great Apostle could describe the new age of the Gospel by saying that when the fulness of time came God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Now, it occurs to us at once to observe that this symbol possesses in the very highest degree the character of universality. It does not derive its power from an historical event or from any temporary association, but from a relationship coextensive with humanity. In this respect it is like the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and like the cleansing waters of baptism. Wherever men are to be found there also are to be found parental love, and filial gratitude and obedience.

But universal as its appeal is it shares the

fortune of all other symbols. It waxes old. Familiarity deprives it of its power, and causes it to stand in need of an interpreter.

This is the position in which we now are. We need to recover for ourselves and our children the meaning of this greatest of symbols. For many it has lost its life. The light that once shone from it shines no longer. Others frankly dispute its truth, they deny that the Unseen God can in any real sense be described as their Father, that they can with any propriety be said to be in the position of children dwelling in freedom and security in their Father's house. Toil and poverty and the hard experience of human ingratitude and covetousness make such language, however natural it may be to others, impossible to them.

To those who would admit the justice of these imputations I would offer the following suggestions.

First, I would ask them whether they may not in their thoughts be confounding a symbol with an exact likeness. A symbol has certain features in common with the thing it represents. But it is not its exact reproduction.

This is a human relationship which we take to represent one that is transcendent and heavenly. We must not put upon our symbol a weight of meaning it cannot bear. Just as the relationship of Christ to His Church was symbolised by marriage, so the relationship of man to God is signified by sonship. In both cases alike we must beware of debasing the heavenly reality by representing it as the exact equivalent of the earthly symbol. It transcends the earthly figure even as the heavens transcend the earth. It is altogether spiritual, while the human relationship is in one of its aspects material.

2. Again, I would urge that to learn practically the meaning of this symbol we must proceed as our Lord has directed us. He pointed to the knowledge of God as that which especially characterised His Sonship. No man, He declared, knoweth the Father but the Son and he to whom the Son will reveal Him. To live as children of God we must first know God. Experience must fill the name for us more and more full of meaning. We must recognise the lessons of science and history as the expressions of His will. We must recall

God's dealings with ourselves, the way He has led us hitherto, the intimations of His purposes to be found in our own lives. We must contemplate Him as seen in Christ. And we must ever remember that knowledge, if pursued apart from love, will not lead to the life eternal. If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen ?

3. Once more, we must beware of supposing that this happy consciousness can be anything but a gradual acquisition, to be attained by watchfulness and discipline. It is not gained once for all, nor when it has been gained will it necessarily remain henceforth undisturbed and unclouded. It is not the result of a miracle, it is the fruit of labour and tears. Each one of us may be called upon to share the well-beloved Son's experience, may in his Gethsemane pray with strong crying and tears that the cup should pass from him, and learn obedience by the things which he suffers.

“ Who ne'er his bread with tears hath ate,
Who never thro' the sad night hours,
Weeping upon his bed hath sate,
He knows you not, ye heavenly powers.”

4. Finally, our knowledge of God as a Father is intimately connected with our consciousness of sin and our sense of the Divine forgiveness. We have been often enabled to repair our mistakes, we have not found the door shut when we desired to return. If a readiness to forgive be the most conspicuous mark of parental love here on earth, we see this mark very visibly in the forbearance with which God has treated, even unto this day, our waywardness and disobedience.

A famous English man of letters* was in the habit of writing down day by day those passages from the books he read which seemed to him to have especial value as principles or rules of life. He went so far as to say that a man's life depended for its solidity and value upon whether he read, and still more upon what he read, during that day. Among the passages thus noted as especially worthy of remembrance are many from the Bible, and first among the entries for one year we find the words, "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son : he that hath the

* Matthew Arnold.

Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life."

Let me commend the words to you as presenting in a theological garb the most practical wisdom, and at the same time the central lesson of all Christian experience. The mind which was in Christ Jesus is the best mind for every earthly lot, for poverty no less than riches, for action no less than for suffering. That mind was the mind of a Son who accepted what the Father sent and did what the Father commanded, and, having learned obedience by the things He suffered, became unto all them that obey Him the author of eternal salvation.

THE HOUR OF CHRIST.*

“Mine hour is not yet come.” S. JOHN ii. 5.

“The hour is come.” S. JOHN xii. 23.

STUDENTS of history will recall many conspicuous persons who have been greatly influenced by the idea of fate or destiny. They have believed that they were fulfilling an appointed task, that their lives were following a predetermined course, and in the confidence of this belief they have exposed themselves recklessly to danger, they have run immense risks, sometimes have rendered great services to mankind, and sometimes have involved themselves and their nation in widespread ruin and disaster.

And obviously there is a sense in which, not merely the lives of the great and the conspicuous, but the lives of all are predetermined

* Preached on Good Friday.

and foreordained. The hour when we shall each die is already as firmly fixed as the hour of this evening's sunset. Known to God from the beginning are all His works. The good works which we shall be permitted to do before the night comes are already prepared for us to walk in. Our future course is marked in lines as little subject to caprice or alteration as the course of the stream or the path of the arrow through the air. If the whole universe would have to be different in order that one pebble should be pushed a foot higher up on the beach by the surf, much more is it inconceivable that our lives and characters should fail to bear their appointed fruits or to reach the limit God has fixed for them.

It is not the recognition of these plain truths we mean to condemn when we condemn fatalism, it is forgetfulness of the all-important fact that towards the final result our choice from hour to hour and from minute to minute is one of the contributing causes. God knows what the result will be, because He knows how we shall act. If the future lies clear in the Divine foreknowledge, it is by us that the future is shaped.

In the fourth gospel the whole course of our Lord's life is contemplated, not from the point of view of an earthly observer, but from that of the eternal wisdom. The Evangelist places himself at the side of Him to whom all things lie naked and open, to whose mind the future is present, and he thus sees every separate incident happening at the precise moment fixed for it in the Divine purpose. In order to present the life of the great subject of his narrative from this point of view, it was necessary, humanly speaking, that the Evangelist should be able to look upon it across a considerable gulf of years. Only so would he see how each separate incident contributed to the final result, the place which each held in the total revelation of God vouchsafed to the world. Standing at a distance he was able to contemplate the whole spectacle under the form of eternity, *sub specie eternitatis*.

And not only did the Evangelist give this form to the incidents of the Saviour's life, he gave it also to His discourses. These discourses differ, in a way which strikes every reader, from the parables and sayings of the first three gospels. We perceive in them unmis-

takably the hand of the Evangelist who has taken detached sayings or truths, which the Master had rather implied than expressed, and woven them into continuous discourses. With the literary problem—one of extreme difficulty—thus presented I am not now concerned. Enough for me to express my belief that these discourses do faithfully present, if not the actual words, at least the mind of the Redeemer.

Contemplating His work from this high standpoint of an eternal and immutable purpose, our Lord in this gospel repeatedly speaks of His hour. In the first of the two passages which form my text the expression seems to mean the moment of His first appearance as a public teacher. This moment He would not hasten, and thus when He was urged to perform an act which would attract public attention and draw towards Him the eyes of men, He said the hour for such an act had not yet come. In the other passage, however, the expression has plainly a different sense. Here it means the hour of consummation, the hour when all that had gone before reached its end, and bore its fruit and attained its result.

“The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified.”

The two hours thus brought before us are related in a way deeply significant and instructive. The first of the two was obviously the herald of the speedy advent of the other. Once His public career began it was inevitable that it should soon close. He placed Himself in sharp antagonism to the follies and the vices of His age ; He was especially severe in His condemnation of sin in high places ; and thus every act which added to His influence and His popularity envenomed the hostility of His powerful enemies. As His greatness increased so their virulence increased also. Thus every step on the road to distinction was at the same time a step on the way to death, and the hour of glory and accomplishment coincided with that of seeming defeat and frustration. “I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me.” “The hour is come when the Son of Man shall be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except the grain of wheat die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.” He was never so powerful as when He hung helpless on the Cross, He was never

so glorious as when He sounded the depths of shame.

Thus there emerges a most impressive lesson. For we may learn how to think of those hours in which the results of many previous years are summed up and concentrated, and which stand out conspicuous in retrospect, the memorable hours of a lifetime.

1. These are, first, hours of attainment. The summit of ambition has been reached. Desire has been fulfilled. We obtain that for which we have long striven. Let us not make the sentimentalist's mistake and pronounce the result to be mere vanity and vexation of spirit. This would be altogether untrue. The pleasure of attainment is most keen, and it is God's will that we should enjoy it to the full. Who would think of coming to the professional man and whispering to him that the success for which he has worked so hard and which has been so long in coming possesses but little worth now that he has gained it? Surely it is our business to rejoice with him, to take his self-denial and his persistence as models for our own imitation. In our philosophy of life there is no mistake against which we should be more

steadily on our guard than that of representing earthly successes and rewards as so unsubstantial as not to be worth striving for. This is a grievous mistake, because it leads us to separate ourselves from our fellow-men, to fancy ourselves their superiors because we can look down upon their toils and endeavours, and see the shadows which they pursue. If ambition is at first ignorant or impure time will purify and instruct it. The life, the death, of the Son of Man teach no lesson more surely than this, “Whosoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.” Seek the eternal in and through the temporal—While you seek the soul’s salvation neglect not the perishable body. “Lay not up treasures upon the earth,” yet “work while it is called to-day.” Be ready to return to the great Master His own with usury.

2. More common than the hours of success are the hours of failure. If we can recall instances when the success has been long delayed but has come at last, we can recall others, and they are more numerous, when it has never come or never seemed to come. And upon all these the hour of the Son of

Man throws its impressive light and bids us consider carefully what we mean by failure and success. The question has been recently put to us by a striking description of the great library which is almost the sole bequest to posterity of a great scholar and historian of the last generation.

“Never,” writes the visitor,* “was there such a pathetic sight of wasted labour. The owner had read it all: there were shelves on shelves on every conceivable subject, and many books were full of hundreds of cross-references in pencil. There were pigeon-holed cabinets with literally thousands of compartments, into each of which were sorted scores of little white papers with references to some particular topic, so drawn up (as far as I could judge) that no one but the compiler could easily make out the drift of the section. Arranged in the middle of the long two-storied room was a sort of altar or column composed entirely of unopened parcels of new books. Over all these were brown holland sheets, a thick coating of dust, the motes dancing in a pale September

*Oman, *Inaugural Lecture on the Study of History*. The allusion is to the library of the late Lord Acton.

sun, a faint aroma of mustiness proceeding from thousands of leather bindings in a room that had been locked up since its author's death. I never saw any sight which so impressed on me the vanity of human life."

This impression was based upon the fact that the owner of the library had spent his life in acquiring knowledge of which he never appeared to have made any adequate use. He lived with the idea ever hovering before him of using his knowledge, but the idea was never fulfilled. Whether he was deterred by his own high standard of excellence, his inability to satisfy himself, by the difficulty of composition, or by his omission to define and limit his aim, we know not; but his immense learning perished, or seemed to perish, with him. The tools he had taken such pains to fashion remained behind, but the work for which they had been prepared was never even begun.

Yet is there nothing to be seen here but failure? Is it nothing to have gained knowledge, although no adequate use may seem to have been made of it? Is it nothing to have left behind the reputation of a conscientious workman, to have impressed upon many

generations of pupils the memory of a man who prized learning for its own sake? Are we sure that the great book, had it been written, would have repaid its author for his labour or preserved his name from oblivion?

Although we should do our utmost to succeed in the world, putting our whole heart and strength into the works of our hands, whatever these may be, yet our affections must all the while be set upon things that are above. We must open our eyes to the indications constantly presenting themselves that the things which are seen are temporal, and that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesses.

Very often real success looks at the time to be failure. The real character of what a man has done is not perceived till after he is dead, just as we do not see the real size of a lofty building until we stand some distance off. Moreover, a man's real work is rather what the man is than what he does, not anything that can be pointed to as his particular achievement, but the memory he has left and the influence he has exercised among those who knew him; his reputation, if so it be, as a

conscientious workman, as a public-spirited citizen, as one who sought the praise of God more than the praise of men. His work may thus be of greater value, not only than he himself knows, but also than any one else knows.

“ Not on the vulgar mass
Called ‘work,’ must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price.

All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, Whose wheel the pitcher
shaped.”

If, then, what is called success should come to us, let us value it. But let us not murmur if it should be denied to us, or think we have been hardly treated; under no circumstances can we look upon it as God’s best reward to those who love Him, for He sometimes allows His most faithful servants to pass from the earth without one human voice, one earthly sign, to assure them that His blessing rests upon them, and that His “well done” has been spoken in heaven.

Respect the strivings of men. Rejoice with them when they succeed. Feel with them when they fail. But look beyond their judg-

nent to that of God. Commit yourself and your doings to Him. Risk failure at His bidding. Remember the hour of the Son of Man —an hour of apparent defeat and yet of lasting victory.

3. And this leads me to a third hour in which we shall all share the experience of Christ whatever our previous course may have been, however widely in outward circumstances our lives may differ from His :

“Thou inevitable day,
When a voice to me shall say
Thou must rise and come away ;

All thine other journeys past,
Gird thee and make ready fast
For thy longest and thy last.

Day deep hidden from our sight
In impenetrable night,
Who may guess of thee aright ?

Shall I lay my drooping head
On some loved lap ? Round my bed
Prayer be made and tears be shed ?

Or at distance from mine own,
Name and kin alike unknown,
Make my solitary moan ?

Will there yet be things to leave,
Hearts to which this heart must cleave,
From which, parting, it must grieve ?

Or shall life's best ties be o'er,
And all loved ones gone before
To that other happier shore ?

Little skills it where or how,
If thou comest then or now,
With a smooth or angry brow :

Come thou must and we must die,
Jesus, Saviour, stand thou by
When that last sleep seals our eye.”*

For this hour every previous one is preparing us. If we would die with Christ we must also live with Him. Patience, calmness, self-possession, loving submission to the Divine will, the characteristics which shine out with such loveliness from so many Christian death-beds—these cannot be put on by the soul in a moment. They are the fruits of a lifetime, God's final rewards to those who have loved and served Him, the fulfilments of His promise to be with them when they pass through the dark valley, to lead them by the still waters. May it be ours to gain them, as they only can be gained, by listening to the present calls of God and walking in love as His dear children ! Then, perhaps, we shall find that the last great enemy will have lost all his terrors as we see

* Archbishop Trench, *Poems*.

him approach and will come to us in the guise of a friend, or if this may not be so we shall have the fortitude of the Son of Man to uphold us, His assurance of pardon to comfort us. United with Him who loved us and gave Himself for us we shall be more than conquerors.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.*

“Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, He is risen.”

S. LUKE xxiv. 6.

Of one only among men has it ever been persistently believed that He rose by His own power from the grave. There have, indeed, been reports and rumours regarding many famous persons that they had escaped death, or even awakened to life again after apparent extinction. These, however, gained no widespread credence, and speedily fell into discredit. Of no one save the Lord Jesus has it been seriously thought that he lived after death, except in the form of posthumous fame or influence. Thus the event we this day commemorate is one unparalleled in history.

This event has from the very beginning awakened the awe and wonder of the Christian believer, and moved him to earnest reflection

* Preached on Easter Sunday.

A large part of the First Epistle to the Corinthians is occupied with perplexities and misgivings which the Resurrection had occasioned among the Corinthians, and which the Apostle endeavours to remove. It is not wonderful that our own age should have witnessed a sharp renewal of this never-ending controversy. The books of the New Testament have been studied during the century which has just closed with unparalleled earnestness and care. The sacred books of other religions have been closely examined, and their correspondences with our own Scriptures have been marked. Vast additions to our knowledge of God's ways have been made by geologists and astronomers and chemists. The central truth of Christianity, for such the Resurrection is, has of necessity been placed in this new setting, and thus new vistas have been opened and new problems brought into view.

It would seem to be the urgent duty of every Christian teacher, in the presence of such a situation, to set forth, as plainly as he can, the truth of the Resurrection as he himself receives it, and thus, if possible, to dispel

confusions and allay misgivings by which the minds of many may well be filled.

The supreme importance of the subject must be apparent to us all, and is attested by most of the great Christian institutions. The first day of the week took the place of the Jewish Sabbath in the new spiritual order, because it was the day of the Resurrection. Baptism became a symbol of the Resurrection. It "represents unto us," our Liturgy assures us, "our profession, which is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto Him, that as He died and rose again for us, so should we die unto sin and live again unto righteousness." And one great purpose of the Eucharist is to assure the believer of an imperishable union with the living and the risen Christ.

Thus the subject has the very strongest claim upon the thought and attention of everyone who would wish his faith to be more than a mere conventional profession or nominal assent. We should not keep here any closed cupboards into which we are afraid to look. We should not acquiesce in any doubts which it is possible to remove. It is true that when

we have pushed our enquiries to their very furthest limits we shall still see beyond us questions we cannot answer and mysteries we cannot fathom. There is a point where knowledge ends and faith begins. But before this point is reached careful thought can, I feel sure, remove from our minds many uncertainties, and clear away some perplexing confusions. The intellectual interest of the subject is, moreover, the least of its claims upon us. It is pressed upon us with an irresistible force every time we stand by an open grave-side and hear the solemn words, "I am the resurrection and the life." The resurrection forms one chief ground of hope for others, as well as for ourselves, when the time comes for the mortal to put on immortality.

I ask, then, what was the essential fact which created the joy of the resurrection, and in which we intend to express our belief in the words, "On the third day He rose again?"

To this question we can have no difficulty in returning an answer. The joy of the resurrection was the discovery that the lost Master was still living: that He had not perished in

the awful catastrophe of Friday : that all was not over when the body was laid in the tomb : but that it was still possible to hold intercourse with Him and to feel His power.

That this was the assurance which made the disciples glad is plain from the nature of the case, and is amply attested by the Scriptures. When they all forsook Him and fled from the Cross they expected no resurrection, and their grief was occasioned, not only by the sense of personal loss, but also, and perhaps still more, by the fear that their Master's work had been annihilated, and the hopes He had raised dashed to the ground. Thus the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, after relating to the unknown stranger the fact of the Crucifixion, immediately go on to speak of their hope of the redemption of Israel which had been thus extinguished. "We hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel." This dread they represent as weighing upon them at that moment, notwithstanding the news they had received that the tomb had been found empty, and that a vision of angels had been seen, who declared that the Lord was alive.

• It was the disappearance of this great dread, the confidence which gradually grew stronger as the days passed, that the Master was not dead, that His work had not been annihilated, but that He still lived, was still within the reach of His people, still pursued His task of redemption and sanctification with increased power and more marked results—this confidence was the joy of the resurrection.

The question is, What were the grounds of this confidence? What was it that brought the disciples from the extremity of despair to an assurance which no subsequent trial could shake? What was it that transformed the wail of hopeless sorrow into the notes of praise?

It is at this point that misconception is most easy, and has been most common. We must recognise, at the outset, that this transformation, like all spiritual processes, is something which we were not permitted to watch, and thus cannot describe. It was accomplished in the darkness where God performs His mightiest works. The mistake which has been made, and of which we are now paying the penalty, was to regard the gospel

narratives of the resurrection as formal proofs by which unbelief might be overcome. This is to put them to a use for which they were never intended. It is to expect from them a service which they cannot render. If it had been God's will that the incredulous world should have been converted by the vision of the risen Christ, this vision would have been accorded to unbelievers as well as believers. This, however, was not the case. No unbelievers saw the risen Jesus. The manifestations were to the disciples only, and not to the world.

Confining our attention, then, to the experiences of the disciples on the days following the Crucifixion, amidst many uncertainties some points stand out beyond all question.

The sight of the risen Lord by many of His disciples, both by individuals separately and by a number of believers assembled together, is attested by indubitable evidence, and may be said to be as certain as any fact of history. S. Paul was expressing what had become the accepted and universal belief when he writes, "I delivered unto you, how that Christ died for our sins... and that he hath been

raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures ; and that he appeared to Cephas ; then to the twelve ; then he appeared to 500 brethren at once ; then he appeared to James ; then to all the Apostles ; and last of all, as unto one born out of due time, he appeared to me also."

Again it is clear that the form thus seen bore upon it the impress of the spirit world, that it was not subject to limitations of matter, that it could pass through closed doors, that it became visible, and again invisible, as material forms do not. We think most truly of the risen Saviour when we associate Him most closely with the Father to whom He returned. He has become a Heavenly Being, capable of being present in many different places at once, capable of dwelling with the Father in the hearts of His disciples.

So much is certain. Beyond this uncertainty begins. We do not know what took place in the tomb where the Lord lay ; nor can we arrange the visions beheld by the various disciples in chronological order. A comparison of the various narratives with each other yields no consistent picture of

what took place on the days following the Crucifixion.

We therefore accept this fragmentariness of the narratives as an indication that further search here will only be a seeking of the living among the dead. We rest satisfied with the undisputed fact that the disciples were assured on these days that their Master lived. We leave the grave, and follow Christ into the spirit world.

Starting now from this point we notice that the assurance thus created by processes which we cannot describe, and in a darkness only illuminated by fitful gleams, remained from that time onwards unshaken. No greater mistake, however, could be made than to suppose that this assurance was communicated from man to man by reasonings and arguments, that the world was reasoned into a belief in the resurrection.

The confidence of the disciples grew ever stronger because they received repeated evidences, as the days passed, that their Master did indeed live. They found that the promises He had made to them came true. They saw that the Crucifixion, instead of

interrupting and annihilating His work, as they had feared, became the mightiest instrument for its furtherance. They saw, in the language of S. Paul, that Christ lived and moved still on the earth, in the persons of those who loved Him and did His bidding. Every addition made to the Church's numbers, every fresh conquest she won, was an assurance that Christ was stronger than the powers of death and hell.

Let us be satisfied with no belief in the Resurrection lower than this. The question we should each ask is, Am I living as one who believes that God raises the dead?

Let us look at our every-day work. Are we doing it as if the rewards of this life were all we had to look for, as if there were nothing more at stake than the immediate gain the work brought us, or have we the faith and the courage to be independent of immediate reward, to be steadfast and immovable amidst poverty and detraction and ill success?

Let us think of our money dealings. These may still bear the impress of materialism, although the pleasures of eating and drinking

may bring us but little temptation. We may think only of the narrow term of our own lives, or we may endeavour to discharge part of the debt we owe to the past by making provision for the future. We may give freely as we have freely received, sowing good seed which those yet unborn may reap.

Let us in every section of our lives think and act as those who believe that nothing true or noble or generous was ever lost, or could ever die.

So it will not be possible for any to say that ours is a religion for the next world, and not for this; that we live in this world as if it were all in all to us, while we profess to believe in a resurrection and a life in another world about which we know nothing. This may not be a caricature of the religion of some Christians, but it is certainly a caricature of the religion of S. Paul. To profess belief in the resurrection, while yet we lived expecting to be paid here and now for everything we did, this would have been to S. Paul to believe in vain.

And if he were to come among us again, it would not be, I am convinced, for our failure

to revive the distant past he would blame us, our inability to pierce the mists of time, to see clearly what God has hidden from the eyes of men ; it would be for the frequent materialism of our lives. Set your affection upon things above, he would say to us once more. Lift up your hearts above your sins and cares. Enter upon that heavenly life into which Christ has raised you.

THE TWO CONDITIONS OF SALVATION.

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” ROMANS x. 9.

AN eminent person once said that no one could understand the Bible who read no other book but it. He meant that such a reader would inevitably carry back the conditions of life existing around him to the distant past. We all do this to some extent. We imagine the men of 2000 years ago to be in all respects like those who meet us on the streets.

Thus we suppose that the first preachers of the Gospel were in much the same position as a modern missionary among the heathen. There was, however, one important difference which makes such a comparison altogether misleading.

The first preachers of Christ in Europe addressed themselves either to Jews or to

those Gentiles who had felt the attractiveness of Judaism, and were more or less familiar with the Old Testament.

So these preachers had one most important advantage over the modern missionary. They were not obliged to begin, so to speak, at the beginning, and teach the Christian doctrines of God and immortality, or even to insist upon the obligations of the fundamental moral laws. All this they could take for granted. They could assume that their hearers knew these things as well as they themselves did. They could proceed at once to the point where difference between themselves and their hearers began, to the addition which they were desirous of making to the faith which they and these listeners alike held.

Now the thing which these hearers were not at all disposed to admit was that a man whose fortunes had been those of Jesus of Nazareth could really be God's chosen messenger and well-beloved Son. Their incredulity on this point arose first from the fact that His entrance into the world had been accompanied by no wonders, that He had come of humble parentage, and had grown to maturity in a district

whose population was mixed and was regarded with suspicion throughout the Jewish world.

We may say : Was the Nativity not marked by many touching wonders ? Were there not many incidents to distinguish it from an ordinary birth ? What of the angelic communications, and the journey of the wise men whom the star guided to Bethlehem, and the things which Mary kept and pondered in her heart ?

The reply must be that these were all things upon which in early ages Christian devotion fed in secret, but which were never used for the purpose of propagating the faith. They do not appear to have been known, during the first Christian generation, to any outside a small circle of believers. There is nothing to show that S. Paul knew of them or that he ever made them the basis of any argument or appeal. Thus the preachers of the Gospel could not appeal to those incidents which in our minds surround Christmas with its halo, because they probably were ignorant of them. If any objector urged that God's envoy would not have entered upon his earthly course in

*this humble fashion, they could only reply that it often pleases God to effect His purposes by means which we should never have thought of choosing. The Gospel of the Infancy, as it has been called, had not been written when S. Paul proclaimed Christ in Corinth and Athens and Rome. Christian faith was already securely established in the world before the contents of the first two chapters of S. Luke's gospel were made public.

It was not only, however, our Lord's humble origin which proved a stumbling-block to belief in Him. A still more serious difficulty was created by the fact that He had been allowed to suffer. Now suffering in the ancient world was universally regarded as an evidence of God's displeasure. If things went wrong with a man, the conclusion always drawn was that he had deserved this. We look upon this as an opinion which the world has disavowed and discarded. This, however, is very doubtful. If a man dies in poverty how rarely do we admit that the poverty may be a sign of his uprightness, that if he had been less scrupulous he would have been more wealthy? On the contrary, we generally blame him for his

poverty and think that we could have done better than he, had we been in his place.

This was, in any case, the universal view of the ancient world. If a man met with adversity the inference invariably drawn was that this was his own fault, that the Divine verdict upon his life was one of condemnation. Thus since Jesus had been allowed to drink to the very dregs the cup of shame and sorrow, since there had been no Divine interposition to scatter His enemies, there seemed no escape from the conclusion that He was a discredited prophet.

To these arguments the messengers of Christ opposed two unvarying contentions. In the first place, they asserted that suffering could not be regarded as an unmistakable mark of God's displeasure. A man might suffer, they affirmed, for righteousness' sake. In such case his sufferings would be an evidence that God loved him. He would suffer not because he was wicked but because he was righteous. So, they maintained, the prophets of old had testified, declaring that the Christ must of necessity suffer.

Their second contention was that the life of

the Lord Jesus had not ended in the grave. We, they said in effect, are here to bear witness that He still lives, that He raised us up from the prostration of grief and terror which for a time overcame us, and that He sent us to awaken the world from the sleep of sin, and call it to the life of righteousness.

So we can appreciate the two conditions to which S. Paul here attaches the promise of salvation: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Here are two demands. First an open acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord and Master. To see the necessity of this we have only to think of the social customs of a city such as Rome. Look at but one feature of its life—its public games. "We hold it," says Bishop Lightfoot,* "in our own age a disgrace to our common Christianity that one relic of these demoralising spectacles should still linger in a European country—the bull-fights of Spain, the legacy of the Moorish occupation. But compare these with the bloody scenes of the

* *Historical Essays.*

Roman amphitheatre, and they pale into insignificance. Nor was the Roman sightseer satisfied with the slaughter of animal life. Without human victims the zest of such entertainments would soon be blunted, and we hear of games at which as many as 10,000 men are said to have fought in the arena, and when the floor would be strewn with the bodies of the fallen, butchered to make a Roman holiday."

From such a society the disciple of Christ must separate himself visibly and unmistakably. He must not only own Christ as his Lord and Master ; He must let his allegiance be seen. There could be no question of his keeping his faith a secret. He must make open profession of his discipleship.

The other essential was that he should believe in his heart that God had raised Jesus from the dead, that the Lord still lived, that His work had not been annihilated, that suffering and death had not been in His case marks of the Divine displeasure but rather necessary steps in the accomplishment of Christ's redeeming work.

However many changes time has brought since then these surely remain the marks of

the disciple of Jesus. He makes some open acknowledgment of his faith. It is not indeed with us, as it is in France, where the open profession of Christian faith is an insuperable barrier to promotion in the public service. Yet many of us must confess to our shame that we do not in any real way confess the Lord Jesus with our mouth. We do not let it appear that we are among His disciples. We gather but seldom at the table which bears witness to His love and His hope. We support the Church perhaps as a political institution—treating it as if it were a pawn in the game of politics—but we do not avail ourselves of its ministries. We are hindered perhaps by indolence, perhaps by false shame. But what an odious thing false shame is in all its forms! And bad as it may be to be ashamed of one's parentage or one's early companions it is yet worse to be ashamed of one's faith, the faith which has been the stay of an innumerable company of just men who watch us from the world unseen.

Still, profession is only valuable when it is the outcome of heart-felt faith. The disciple of Christ believes in his heart now as in all previous ages that the God of peace brought

again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep with the blood of the eternal covenant. He believes that the death of Christ was a step to a glorious resurrection.

In this faith he is willing for his own part to do without present happiness, or what is ordinarily deemed such, if he can only fulfil the Divine Will. He is ready to lose his life that he may find it. He believes that love and sincerity and high purpose are never brought to nought, although they may appear to have been overthrown and annihilated and buried. He knows that they rise again joyful and triumphant. This is his living faith. It is not a languid acquiescence in the story of the resuscitation of a dead man 2000 years ago. It is a faith in that undying Christ who has never left the world, who is seated at God's right hand in heaven, and yet who is present among us here.

The great danger to which this faith is now exposed arises, not from study and enquiry, for these can only strengthen it. It arises from materialism. We live at a moment when science has multiplied beyond all anticipation the instruments of material comfort. It is

inevitable at such moments that things which do not directly minister to human well-being should be little heeded, that large numbers should think only of the things that please and profit and pay. So there is serious danger that the faith of Christ—a spirit of unworldliness and abnegation—should be submerged, and for a time silenced beneath the advancing tide of materialism.

Let those who would deplore such a result take care that these two marks of Christian discipleship are set upon their lives. Let them ask themselves whether they are in any real sense confessing the Lord Jesus with their mouth, or giving effect to the belief that God raised Him from the dead. Many of you have children who will inherit your faith as they inherit your habits of mind and body. Let us see that the faith we bequeath them is a real faith, one that will shield them in the hour of temptation, sustain them when heart and flesh fail, lead them across the waves of this troublesome world till they come to the land of everlasting life.

THE ESSENTIALS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF.*

“Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for it is he that shall save his people from their sins.” S. MATT. i. 21.

AT this season we retrace the devious course of history, and go back to the cradle of our faith. It is well that we should do so from time to time. To-day we see Christian faith in a highly developed form. Christianity has come to be a word of wide and doubtful meaning. The great majority of our fellow-countrymen would call themselves Christians. Yet they differ endlessly one from the other in character and belief. Christianity probably means for many who use the word that great system of organised worship established in our midst. It represents to their minds the churches we see around us, and those who worship in them, and the worship they offer.

* Preached on Christmas Day.

The Christmas season will not allow us to rest content with these vague conceptions. It leads us back to the fountainhead of the long and winding river. It bids us look to the rock whence we were hewn, to the hole of the pit whence we were digged. It brings before us a Christianity not expressed as yet either by a Church, a Bible, or a Priesthood.

Let us, then, follow the call of the season, and consider what Christian faith was before it had clothed itself in these necessary vestures. We shall then have a touchstone by which to test the sincerity of our own beliefs. When we profess and call ourselves Christians what do we really mean ?

Christianity, then, in its original form was the announcement of a Divine intervention in the affairs of men. It was a declaration that God had interfered in a wondrous fashion, and made known to men what He intended to bring about and what He required from them. The revelation was not made by a voice speaking from the clouds, but by a human being who spoke with the authority, more than the authority, of a prophet.

Jesus of Nazareth appeared as a public

teacher, announcing that the kingdom of God was at hand, and calling upon those who gathered round Him to prepare for its coming. He gave no formal explanation of what He meant by the kingdom of God, but left His listeners to put their own interpretation upon the expression. No doubt these interpretations would vary in different minds, and would be more or less noble according to the insight of the interpreter. Sometimes the Kingdom would be regarded as an earthly commonwealth, whose citizens would have abundant stores of material wealth, and would enjoy undisturbed prosperity. Sometimes, on the other hand, attention would be concentrated on the fact that God Himself and no earthly potentate was to be the Ruler of the Kingdom. When this Divine sovereignty was realised the Kingdom would inevitably come to appear as a moral or spiritual one, and its distinguishing characteristic would be found, not in material well-being, but in loyalty to the Heavenly King, and in obedience to His laws.

The new teacher claimed for Himself an unique place in the kingdom whose coming He thus announced. He asserted that none

would be admitted within it except those who were like Himself. So He set up His own character and life as an example for His disciples. They could not think of the Kingdom without thinking at the same time of Him, —His unswerving submission to the Divine will and His love for men, His brethren.

After a brief ministry He was put to a shameful death, but this death, instead of discrediting the announcement He had made, gave it fresh vitality and power. His disciples were convinced that He still lived, and that He would return to complete His work. So they in their turn took up the announcement, and went out, first into the Jewish and then into the Greek and Roman world, exhorting men (to use the words of one of them) to turn “from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.”

The announcement was eagerly received and rapidly disseminated, because it met and satisfied certain imperious cravings of the human heart, and enabled men to understand themselves. Especially was it welcomed by those who knew more of the shadow of life than of

its sunshine, by those who knew what it was to be poor, to suffer, and to toil without recognition. It was welcomed by them because it gave them hope and courage, and made life seem less dreary and desperate. The Gospel was thus in its earliest shape addressed particularly to those who felt the burden of existence and who were searching for an answer to importunate doubts and questionings. Those upon whom for any reason the burden did not press, to whom life brought as much satisfaction as they asked—such persons, we gather, were not as a rule touched or affected at all by the Christian ferment.

The new faith appeared thus as emphatically a message of hope. It disclosed two prospects, both of them bright with hope.

1. It opened up the vision of a perfect commonwealth in a dimly outlined future. It represented the world as moving on towards some great consummation which should satisfy the hopes of the best and most enlightened men. The perfect commonwealth was not originally thought of as heaven in our sense of that word. Its scene was laid, in the imagination of the first Christians, here on the

earth. They looked for a new heaven and a new earth. They hoped to see again their vanished Master; and live with Him in a state undisturbed by sorrow and sin. This was the Christian form of the Messianic hope of the Jews. No doubt among the earliest Christians the hope was exceedingly simple and easily grasped, far simpler than we are apt to suppose with our sharply defined notions of flesh and spirit, and our habits of analysing and defining our thoughts and beliefs.

2. Besides this future prospect, however, the Gospel offered to men an actual and present blessedness. The central invitation of Christ was "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." What He meant by rest was a spiritual repose and self-possession. His assurance was that such composure would be the portion of those who would unite themselves with Him in heart and mind, who would think, feel, act as He did. So He made Himself the object of their contemplation. In the centre of the Christian disciple's thoughts there stands a living Master, Guide, Deliverer, whose mind he endeavours to make his own.

What, more precisely, is the mind that was thus in Christ, and after which the disciple strives?

Of God he strives to think as the Father of the whole human family, a Power illimitable by human thought, indescribable by human language, who orders the course of this world, so that good shall be the outcome of all evil. In the darkness in which His footsteps are often hidden the disciple endeavours still to have confidence in Him, and thus to hope and not despair. And looking up with this filial feeling to the unseen Source of Life, he strives also to think of his fellow-men as brethren bound to him by the strong ties of a common nature and a common destiny.

These are, as I understand it, the essentials of Christian faith. To meet the present, to look forward to the future, with the mind which was in Christ—to be thus one with Christ in cloud and sunshine, in life and death—this is to be a Christian. The Christian does not claim any knowledge of the unseen world denied to other men. He claims not to be better than other men, but only to know his weaknesses better. Nor does he think that

he has already attained, but only that he is pressing on slowly and painfully towards a distant goal.

This faith has now been many centuries in the world, and has passed through the minds of many generations of men. In the course of this long life it has assumed shapes which in the minds of many distort it, and hinder its further progress.

Two of these perversions seem specially charged with danger.

1. Christianity is identified in the minds of very many with what is known as other-worldliness. It is regarded entirely as a promise of happiness after death. The rest of Christ is pictured not as a present blessedness, but as a future felicity. Thus the actual world is condemned and rejected. Its joys are pronounced to be vain, its pursuits worthless. The Christian is detached from earthly interests and duties, and is urged to fix his mind upon a life yet to come.

You will see from what I have said how readily such a perversion could arise. It is a very natural exaggeration of the Messianic hope of which I have spoken. None the less

has it done much to weaken the appeal of Christ, and to distort His likeness.

2. Another misconception affects those without the Church rather than those within it. They see that much Christian worship is formal and lifeless. They notice the frequent apathy of the Churches towards fashionable sins and profitable abuses of power. They see these Churches following their routine of prayer and praise while their members take part in the unscrupulous struggle for wealth, as if the Christian ideal had no existence. So they draw the conclusion that whatever Christian faith may originally have been, it has now in its current forms ceased to influence and control the conduct of its professors. They make the wholly unjustifiable assumption that the Christian disciple considers it as his chief duty rather to worship Christ in verbal prayer and praise than to make the mind of Christ his own.

Thus we are held responsible for the very sins we deplore, and for the misconceptions against which we incessantly protest.

So we are all called upon by perversions from within and hostility from without to

contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. We have to show by word and life what Christian discipleship really means, that Christ does really save His people from their sins, and that they who follow Him do not walk in darkness, but that they have the light of life.

Students may do this by discerning and presenting the features of primitive Christianity, by bringing to light the corruptions and misunderstandings which have gathered round the faith and disfigured it in the course of its long history.

But the task is not ours alone. You may perhaps never have paused to consider how greatly the preacher is influenced by his hearers. The preacher must address himself to those who are actually listening to him. His thoughts must meet theirs. He must choose subjects in which they are interested, and he must handle these subjects in a way which will engage their sympathies. The sermons of an age thus reflect its aspirations and mark the level which its knowledge and insight have reached. And I make bold to say that if educated men and women were

more conspicuous in our churches than they are, the sermons preached in these churches would be better, the whole life of the Church would be braced and strengthened. But too often the claims of the Church are unheeded, and the opportunity of worship is neglected for some pleasure that brings neither refreshment nor peace.

I put this before you, educated men and women, as a plain and urgent duty. We are all alike members of the Church of Christ. We are all alike concerned in preserving for future generations the pure and reasonable religious faith we have inherited. If the Church is to be what it should be, a source of light and life to the nation, we must be prepared to make some sacrifice on her behalf.

Let us all then alike recognise the obligation resting upon us to be what we profess to be, disciples of Christ, following Him in simplicity and purity of life, and acknowledging not only here but at all times the sovereignty and the love of God, and the brotherhood of mankind.

THE CHURCH AND HER CREEDS.*

“Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.”

S. JOHN vi. 66-68.

UPON very few of His human children does God impose the responsibility of choosing their religion. The great majority of mankind inherit their religion, just as they inherit their nationality and their lot in life. The child of Mohammedan parents, in all probability, remains to the end a Mohammedan. The child of Christian parents, except under very rare circumstances, lives and dies a Christian.

Thus it seldom happens to one of ourselves to be called upon to examine his faith with that personal anxiety we should undoubtedly feel were we now making choice of it for the first time. We rightly think that we are not

* Preached on Trinity Sunday.

required to expose the Church's creeds, each for himself, to an independent examination. We are not in the position of a man who is called upon to sign a document he has never seen before, and who is consequently bound to scrutinise suspiciously every word and clause. This is not our relation to the Church's creeds. It is enough that these creeds have expressed for centuries the faith of our countrymen and ancestors.

Still, occasions do sometimes arise which constrain us to look more closely into our beliefs and to ask more earnestly what the articles of our creed really mean.

It may be that we find the Gospel presented to us in a form from which our reason recoils. We hear the name of Christian refused to all except a small fragment of the existing Church. Sudden conversion is represented as the gate through which all must pass who would enter into life; or confident assertions are made regarding the state of those who have passed into the unseen world. Their destiny is spoken of with an assurance which we would fain share, but from which we feel ourselves excluded. Or, again, religious opinions unheard of before

are propounded, and claim to be the message of the Spirit of Truth to our own generation. We are told that our unrest will be at an end, and that peace will be our portion, if we accept this or that new teaching or follow this or that new practice.

• Besides these exceptional calls to reflection, the natural growth of our minds often gives to the articles of the Creed a reality they did not before possess. Our faith seems to be slipping away from us, and we begin to enquire as a matter of personal concern what a Christian should really know and believe for his soul's health.

These experiences of our own may tell us how the Church came in the first instance to need creeds. At first she had no formulated creed because none was necessary. Christians held the religious beliefs of Jews, and in addition accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and lived in expectation of His return from heaven to judge the quick and the dead.

Thus, if you will examine the passages in the New Testament which describe the admission of a new convert into the Church, you will find that this is the simple profession of

faith which he makes. The Philippian jailor asks in his terror, "What must I do to be saved?" and receives the answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," that is, accept Jesus as Lord and Christ and thou shalt be saved. The officer of the Ethiopian queen, previous to his baptism, makes the same confession. "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

So S. Paul contrasts the present position of the Christians of Thessalonica with their position previous to their conversion, by saying that they had turned from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven. Previously they had been idolaters, worshipping deities who were lifeless and unreal. Now they served a living and true God, and waited in love and temperance for the reappearance of His Son, whom they expected to come again in judgment.

Such was the earliest Christian creed. There was no necessity to commit it to writing. It was so simple that it ran no risk of being either forgotten or misunderstood.

An instant's reflection, however, shows us that this happy situation must of necessity be

as short-lived as the hours of the morning or the years of childhood. Very soon doubts and misunderstandings would arise. The mere lapse of time would bring unthought-of problems, and there would be none of the fathers left, whose decision would put an end to controversy.

So formal creeds or summaries of belief, which could be used for the instruction of new converts, or appealed to in disputes with strange teachers, came into being. S. Paul seems already to be alluding to such a summary when he says in his Epistle to the Romans that whereas these Roman Christians had once been servants of sin, they had now become obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto they were delivered. The form of teaching seems to mean some simple summary of Christian belief such as I have described.

Such were the first beginnings of our present creeds. As the centuries passed, the primitive statements of faith were found insufficient, and creeds became more lengthy and elaborate. Christian belief became a matter of keen intellectual interest. Conflicting doctrines were confidently put forward as the Church's creed.

So to put an end to uncertainty, and silence controversy, the simple primitive creed was amplified and expanded. It was thought that the truth could not be too carefully or emphatically stated. Hence creeds tended to become ever more lengthy and more precise. Of the three creeds which our Prayer Book contains, the latest—the creed of S. Athanasius, as it is called—is the longest. Long as this creed is, however, it is short beside the doctrinal confessions of the sixteenth century, the creed of the Council of Trent, or the Confession of Augsburg or the Thirty-nine Articles. These lengthy formulas, however, represent the spirit of an age when creeds had become a matter of angry controversy rather than of devout conviction.

The creed which our Church offers to us as an authoritative summary of Christian belief is the short formula we repeat each Sunday and know as the Apostles' Creed. In this every one admitted to the Church in baptism professes his belief. Asked whether he believes all the articles of this creed he makes answer, "All this I steadfastly believe." Afterwards in confirmation he is reminded of this promise

which he has made, or which has been made on his behalf, and asked to rehearse the articles of his belief. To this he replies by repeating the Apostles' Creed.

This is the only formal profession of faith the Church of England requires from a layman. The two longer and later creeds are indeed introduced into our public worship. But we do not individually proclaim our adhesion to them as we do in the case of the shorter creed.

Serious misgivings are entertained by many English Churchmen regarding the propriety of retaining in the Prayer Book the rubric which provides that instead of the Apostles' Creed "the Confession of our Christian Faith commonly called the Creed of St. Athanasius" shall be recited on thirteen days throughout the year. These misgivings, occasioned not by the substance of the creed but by its damnable clauses, as they are called, have been shared by a long succession of illustrious churchmen from the days of the Reformation to our own. I believe it is an open secret that the whole or the great majority of the present Episcopate would welcome the modification of this rubric, could it be modified

without provoking heated and dangerous controversy.

The most fundamental question, however, connected with the Church's creed is presented equally by all three creeds. It is, what do we really mean when we say "I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"?

This is obviously the distinctive part of the Christian creed. The first converts admitted to the Church appear, as we have seen, to have professed their faith in these very words. This simple profession has been expanded into those articles which form the second section of the Apostles' Creed, in which we pass in rapid review our Lord's earthly career from His birth until His coming again in judgment.

What, then, is the belief we mean thus to express?

We mean, I would urge, in the first place, to profess ourselves disciples of the Lord Jesus. We sit at His feet as pupils sit at the feet of a master. We do not pretend to be able to understand every one of His words, to establish each of His claims, to justify each of His anticipations. This is not required of disciples. This is the task of critics and

judges, and it is one we may altogether disclaim. It is enough for us to believe that He has the words of eternal life, that His mind is the best mind for every situation, and to desire that this mind should be ours.

We mean, again, to express our belief that His appearance among men was the intervention of God Himself in human affairs, that it declares God's purpose to save men from their sins, and to bring them by a gradual process to a knowledge of Himself. This is the Church's faith in the Incarnation. So we look upon happiness and not misery, salvation not destruction, as the eternal purpose for the human race, the one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves.

Thus we mean emphatically to disavow two other forms of belief which never cease to plead with us for acceptance. One of these is the creed of materialism, the belief that man does live by bread alone, that he is as the beasts that perish, and can find rest for his soul, even as they. The other is the creed of pessimism, the belief that evil and not good is destined to be in the end victorious, and that it is only the visionary who hopes that sin

will ever be cast out, and sorrow and sighing made to cease. The Christian looks forward to good as the ultimate end and explanation of evil, to joy as the final consummation of sorrow, and to comfort as the end of mourning. He hopes and does not despair. He works and does not sit still.

The present day is frequently represented to us as a time of great unsettlement of belief. There are around us many different sects or denominations of Christians, and people are sometimes heard to say that amidst so many conflicting representations of Christian doctrine they really do not know which to accept, and so they allow themselves to drift away into indifference or positive unbelief.

With regard to these internal divisions, let me here say that I believe it to be, on the whole, God's intention that a man should live and die in the faith professed by his parents. It is most desirable that every child should have some one Church of which he feels that he is a member. To this Church he should adhere. Its worship he should attend. For it he should work. And no wise teacher, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, Church-

man or Nonconformist, would, as I believe, ever think of disturbing anyone in a spiritual home in which he found himself at peace.

But besides these internal differences, there is also much uncertainty regarding the meaning of the creed which all Christians alike accept. This uncertainty is apt to be thrust into view by this day, Trinity Sunday. If you will look at the Church Catechism you will there find the creed summed up in three sentences, expressive of the Church's faith in the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. The child is asked what he chiefly learns in these articles of his belief, and he makes answer that he learns to believe in God the Father, who has made him and all the world; in God the Son, who has redeemed him and all mankind; and in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifies him and all the elect people of God.

The word "person," you will observe, is not so much as mentioned, and it is this word which is responsible for a very large part of the misunderstanding of which I have been speaking. For the word "person" now means but one thing—a human being, a man or

woman such as we ourselves. When, however, it was applied by theologians to the Godhead, this was not the meaning they intended. They were thinking of the first and original meaning of the Latin word *persona*, which is a mask worn by an actor on the stage. The ancient actors were in the habit of wearing these masks. The mask was known as a *persona*, hence the word came to be used for the personage who played the part, and also for the part or rôle he played.

Now when we speak of the three persons of the Godhead, what we mean is that the Unseen and Eternal Being has revealed Himself under three masks or in three characters, the mask of creative power, the mask of redeeming love, and the mask of sanctifying grace. That He does so reveal Himself is not a theory or a supposition. It is the experience of everyone I am addressing.

It is the deliberate repudiation of the faith thus formulated that we mean by heresy. The heretic finds himself unable to accept one or other article of the creed. He cannot reconcile this or that belief with his reason. So far he has done nothing amiss. But he does not stop

here. He proceeds to make some open proclamation of his own opinion. He does not merely put it forward tentatively, asking the Church to prove it, whether it be really true. He enters the lists on its behalf. He gathers others round him who think with him. The result is the formation of a party or a faction such as S. Paul had in his mind when he said to the Corinthians: "There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest."

Thus it is plain that the word heresy or heretic, if this be the meaning we put upon it, does really deserve the bad significance it has gradually acquired. Faction and party spirit are odious things, and we should never forget, if we find ourselves at war with the bulk of our fellow-creatures, that the error is far more likely to be on our side than on theirs. The man who opposes his own judgment to the general practice or the general belief, and who does this confidently and unhesitatingly, is very seldom in the right. He deserves to be suspected of self-will and vanity.

But, on the other hand, there may be differences from the established creed of the Church,

or what is thought to be so, which by no means deserve the odious name of heresies.

It is probable that there are no two reflecting persons among us who think exactly alike on such articles of the creed as the Resurrection of the Body, or the Communion of Saints, or the Life Everlasting. Our education, our disposition, our past experience, make the belief of every one of us on these points separate and individual. This individuality is not heresy.

Again, we may even go beyond this. A man may propose some opinion or interpretation of his own for the consideration of his fellow-men or the Church without running any risk of heresy.

It is quite obvious that the Church's greatest saints and doctors have sometimes been in this very position. They have thought that the mind of Christ was misunderstood on some point by the Church of their day. They have put forward their own opinion with earnestness, and yet with humility. They have defended it and championed it to the very utmost of their power. And sometimes they have been in the right, and the opinion they advocated has at last gained universal acceptance. They

may have been accused of heresy in their day, but they were not heretics, because faction and party spirit were utterly abhorrent to them. Their aim was to establish the truth, although they appeared to be assailing it ; to cleanse and so defend the existing Church, to extend the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every creed is best regarded as a prayer. When we repeat the Church's creed, we mean not that these beliefs are fully formed within us, but that we do hold them in some measure already, and that we desire to make them stronger, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ ever more fully, and follow Him ever more earnestly.

Let this be the spirit in which we each repeat the Church's creed. Let us consider its individual statements as all subsidiary to the general view of human life and duty it is intended to establish. If we put upon it this broad and truly apostolic meaning, if we consider what we have to put in its place, I doubt not but that it will move us to exclaim : "Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life."

III. THE HOPE OF IMMORTALITY.

THE PRESENT RESURRECTION.

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life : he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die.”

JOHN xi. 25.

WE are so constituted that it is our own part, even in the very greatest issues, which most affects us. Thus in contemplating the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, we are apt to think first of our own concern in it, and of the light it throws upon our destiny. We shall all, each in his turn, die, and before that time comes, we shall probably see many whom we have loved entering death's dark and solemn portal. We would fain learn from the Easter message—“He is not here, he is risen”—how to think of this stern and awful fact in human existence—the fact of death.

It would be quite unpardonable either for me to speak or for you to listen to any word on this subject which we did not feel to be

true. If there is any subject within the whole range of Christian belief, which calls beyond others for reality, it is the one we are now considering. Let us ask, then, how does the Resurrection of Jesus Christ affect our present state and our future hopes? It was possible for the Church of Corinth to believe in the Lord's Resurrection while yet they doubted or denied their own. So it would be possible for us to assent to this article of the creed and say, "I believe in the Resurrection of the dead," while yet we showed by our lives that we were really untouched by the hope of immortality; that we had no thoughts and aspirations to carry us beyond the span of time allotted to us here. How, then, are we to think of the Lord's Resurrection so that it may make us live as immortal beings?

Before I answer, let me say one brief word as to the situation in this respect, in which our Lord found the world, and especially that part of it gifted beyond the rest with religious insight and knowledge—the Jewish people.

The hope of immortality, when we trace it to its roots, we find to be an instinctive

craving for life and recoil from death. This recoil seems to be natural to all living beings, to be common to man and the beasts of the earth. Everything that lives wishes and strives to continue to live, and struggles with all its power to ward off death.

• In this simple and instinctive sense, we may speak of the hope of immortality as inseparable from human thought, an indestructible desire of the human heart.

When, however, we pass beyond this, and search in the pre-Christian world for definite, reasoned conceptions of a future state, it is only among a section of the Jewish people, if even there, that we can be said to find what we seek. Among Greeks and Romans we find vague and floating fancies rather than distinct and firm beliefs. Educated men in the time of Christ had, for the most part, ceased to think of any conscious existence beyond the grave. And although shadowy anticipations of survival might haunt the general multitude, they cannot have possessed much efficiency or been the source of much consolation.

The beliefs of Jews on the subject are less easy to describe. In the Old Testament

generally, says Dr. Driver,* death is regarded as the limit of all existence worthy of the name of life—"The belief on the subject of a future life" (I am quoting this learned writer's exact words), "shared by the ancient Hebrews was, not that the spirit after death ceased to exist, but that it passed into the under-world, where it entered upon a shadowy half-conscious existence, devoid of interest and occupation, and not worthy of the name of life."

The Jews, however, in their firm belief in an eternal God, to whom they were bound by indissoluble ties, had the greatest of all the supports of the hope of immortality. When they lifted up their souls to Him, they passed among the things eternal. Hence, we are not surprised to find that during the two centuries preceding our Lord's birth, a very large section of the Jewish people, the whole Pharisaic portion of it, hoped and believed that the many faithful Israelites who had died without having inherited the promises, would rise from their graves, and share in the joys of Messiah's kingdom. Thus, while in the books of Moses, the historical books, the earlier prophets, the

* *Sermons on the Old Testament.*

Proverbs, and the majority of the Psalms, death is regarded as the limit of human existence, in the book of Daniel (whose composition is almost universally assigned to the second century before the Christian era), we read that “many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

A survey of the world at our Lord’s birth thus shows us the Greek and Roman part of it to be practically untouched by the hope of a life beyond the tomb, while among the largest section of the Jews there is an intense belief that God’s promises to the nation cannot fail, and that even death will not exclude His servants from the joy of their fulfilment.

I bring these facts of history before you, because they are often forgotten or misrepresented. But I do not suppose that the knowledge of them is calculated to make our own hope of immortality clearer or stronger. The evidence that we are immortal must be sought not outside, but within the soul. In former days, “proofs” of immortality, as they were called, were frequently formulated. We have learned to recognise that it is with this,

as with the other great hopes by which men are lifted above themselves. If these hopes are to be made stronger, the soul itself must be strengthened. Thus the first Christians hoped with unwavering confidence that death would not separate them from their Master, because they felt assured of His actual nearness to them. It was not that He had said much to them of a future life. It was simply that He had made them feel that the spiritual union with Him, of which they were now conscious, would never be broken. What is implied in this is made plain to us in the conversation, a part of which I have chosen as my text. The speakers were Martha and the Lord Jesus, and the subject of the conversation was the death of Lazarus.

Martha had just said, "I know that my brother shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Perhaps there was some disappointment and impatience in the remark, as if she had said, "Oh yes, I know that there will be a general resurrection at the last, when my brother and all other men will rise again. But I do not find any great consolation in this. The prospect is vague and remote." In any

case, the Lord recalls her thoughts from the future and fixes them upon the present. He says to her in effect, "No, the consolation I offer you is not a future consolation. It is a present and actual one. It is not that I assure you of a resurrection at the last, when I shall awaken the dead from their sleep ; it is that I am now the resurrection and the life ; He that believeth on Me, though physically he die and his body be reduced to its component dust, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never know that sense of extinction which is what we dread in death. Material dissolution he may experience, but he shall never know that which forms death's chief terror."

This is the unquestionable meaning of our Lord's words. It is not that we are softening down their original sense, so as to bring it into accord with our modern ideas. This is what the words, in their first and natural sense, were intended to convey. You may bring against the words the charge of subtlety, or over-refinement. But it is not possible to deny, that if it is worth while to interpret them at all, these are the ideas they represent.

Obviously, then, the question they raise is this: what is the belief in Christ or the life in Christ upon which immortality is here made to depend? In other words, how am I to live so that I shall never know this sense of extinction, this collapse of all my hopes, this annihilation of my being which alone is death?

To this our Lord replies, not indeed in any one saying, but by His whole teaching and example, "You live this life in the degree in which you are now able to do without any visible or material payment, in which your strivings are directed towards ends which are in themselves noble, or to be desired, whether you ever reap any benefit from them or not." This life is immortal because its aims and interests are not bounded by the term of a human life. He who so lives, let him express his creed as he may, let him be ever so straitened by the weakness of his imagination, lives the life immortal. He shall never die. Whereas another man may profess the utmost confidence in the resurrection of the dead, and yet he may show that his mind is set, not upon the things above, but upon the things of the earth, things of which we feel the power

because we are creatures of time, but which we know in our best moments to be unsubstantial.

Thus the Lord's Resurrection fixes our minds, not upon death, but upon life. It lifts up our hearts towards the things unseen and eternal. It assures us that Christ is living and working still in our midst by the agency of His Spirit. We are His Body, His very self. By our strivings His life is continued. Because He lives, we live also. Thus the Christ of the first century becomes the Christ of the twentieth century. His presence is perpetuated in those men and women who are enabled by His Spirit to live the life immortal.

It is of the continued presence in the world of this living Christ and His assured victory over all the forces of death and destruction that we mean to express our steadfast belief when we say that He rose again from the dead.

He has entered upon His deathless kingdom. He has risen, never to die as long as the love which is stronger than death influences human hearts; as long as the truth to which He came to bear witness raises up

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exponents and defenders. As long as men and women, taught by Him to overcome the world, remain upon the earth, He has risen never to die. "Death has no more dominion over him, and of his kingdom there shall be no end." "He shall reign till he has put all enemies under his feet, and God shall be all in all."

THE LAST THINGS.*

“Let not your heart be troubled : ye believe in God,
believe also in me.” S. JOHN xiv. 1.

IT may well seem strange to us that we should know so little, and that there should be so many conflicting opinions, on a subject which concerns us so very closely as the destiny of the human soul after death. Year after year, and century after century, men have been straining to catch some authentic glimpse of what lies beyond the grave, but no appreciable result has rewarded the search. Even those who think they can hold intercourse with the spirits of the dead are obliged to confess that the fruits of such intercourse are as yet meagre and unsatisfying. And if we exclude these dubious experiments we are in precisely the same position in this respect as were those of whom the Apostle was the mouthpiece when

* Preached in Advent.

he said "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Our knowledge has received no additions since then. Still we stand on the threshold, and knock at a door which remains closed and impenetrable.

We can hardly be wrong in supposing that this ignorance, bewildering though it may at times appear, is really for the best, and that it will remain for ever a characteristic of the lot of man. It is difficult to think that those who stand in our places 1000 years hence will see more clearly than we see now, or that they would be the better for so seeing.

Thus we can only repeat to ourselves the truths and assurances which have been in every age of the Church the stay of the Christian believer, and which we find expressed in those passages, now once more recalled to our recollection.

The great perplexity of the first generation of Christians arose from the fact that the Master had passed away beyond the reach of sight and hearing, while the world remained to all outward appearance very much what it had been before He came. Day had followed

day, and year had followed year, and still all things remained as they had been from the beginning. The day had not come when death should be swallowed up in victory, and the Lord God should wipe away the tears from all faces. Still iniquity abounded. Still there was want and destruction and misery. So the Church lived for many years in the expectation of the Master's speedy return. Each year as it dawned was expected to be the year of redemption, and to usher in the great consummation. Some sudden breaking of the clouds was looked for when Christ would descend from the skies, attended by hosts of angels, and establish a kingdom that could never be moved.

Sustained by this expectation, Christians lived on until nearly 100 years had passed since the withdrawal of Christ from the earth. Then, or to speak more exactly, about the year 100 A.D. appeared a mysterious treatise which shifted the perspective of the believer, which fixed his eyes upon the present rather than upon the future, and softened, although it did not by any means extinguish, the hope of a sudden advent of Christ yet to come.

This treatise, small in size but great in power and influence, is the book known to us as the Gospel according to S. John. A tradition, which remained practically unquestioned until about a century ago, ascribes its authorship to John, the son of Zebedee, one of our Lord's original twelve disciples. The correctness of this tradition has, as is well known, been much disputed in recent years. The discussion is not one into which we can now enter. It must be enough to say that there seems to me to be two different persons discernible in the composition of the book—one a close companion of our Lord, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and the other who actually wrote the gospel, basing it upon the recollections which the original disciple had left behind.

However this question may ultimately be decided—if, indeed, we must not be content to leave it for ever in suspense—there can be no doubt as to the purpose which this gospel was intended to serve. It was written in order to show that the salvation to be found in Christ was not only a future, but also a present salvation, that He was the bringer to

men of a present light, a present health, a present resurrection.

Thus the teaching of the gospel is that those promises for whose fulfilment the Church was looking to the future had been in a real sense already fulfilled, that the kingdom had already come, that heaven had been brought down to the earth, that the life eternal was already within the reach of the believer.

These lessons our Lord Himself teaches in His discourses throughout the gospel, and especially in those conversations with His disciples which fill the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th chapters. These discourses cannot be regarded, I need scarcely say, as literal reports of His words. No ancient historian ever attempted to reproduce a speech exactly as it had been spoken ; he gave in his own words the substance of what the speaker had said. So the sublime discourses of Christ which fill these chapters should be looked upon as the explicit statement of truths which were lying waiting to be unfolded in the words He had actually uttered, and which stand recorded in the earlier gospels.

Thus, if we adjust the teaching of the gospel

upon the last things—death, judgment, heaven and hell—to our own situation, endeavour to learn what it has to say to ourselves with our knowledge and our habits of thought, we see the following important truths rising up before us :

1. Above all else, we notice that the eternal future is here represented as an intensification of joys and sorrows which we already in some measure know. We are not encouraged to believe that there will be in the future some great transformation which will make us quite different from what we now are. On the contrary, we are taught to think that the spirit is even now fashioning for itself a heaven or a hell in which it contentedly dwells, and that death will effect no miraculous change or conversion. The eternal or abiding life begins here and now, and suffers no extinction or loss at death.

2. Thus we are led to think of the Divine judgment, when the good and the bad are separated by the Supreme Judge, as something which is already in progress. Men are now each day and each hour ranging themselves among the friends of Christ or among His

enemies. They are choosing the better part or the worse. They are shaping an ineffaceable character. The final judgment will only clearly reveal the accumulated results of a lifetime. Thus the Divine Speaker solemnly declares : “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me hath eternal life and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.”

3. So, again, the misery to which we give the name of hell is represented, not as proceeding from the situation in which a man is, but as reflected outwards by the spirit within, just as a lantern colours with its own light the trees and hedges upon which it falls. In all previous conceptions of hell the opposite course had been pursued. The soul’s wretchedness had been represented as occasioned by the place of torment to which it was condemned. So the common image of hell among the Jews was the dark valley near Jerusalem where in days gone by men had sacrificed their sons and daughters to Moloch. A moment’s reflection, however, convinces us that it is from ourselves, and not from our situation, that our

wretchedness—if we are wretched—proceeds. Give a man every possible source of gratification—give him health, and wealth, and friends, and books, and pictures, and everything else that men commonly covet, and he may still be miserable: whereas he may be at peace even although few or none of these gifts are his.

So in this gospel no mention is made of a place of torment. The word “hell” or “gehenna” is not found here. Our attention is fixed upon the present loss of those who reject Christ and who join His enemies. They are already, we are given to understand, in the darkness of death. Nothing is said about their ultimate destiny. What is implied regarding them is that life has been offered to them and they have refused it. “Ye will not come to me,” says the Divine Speaker to His opponents, “that ye may have life.” They loved the darkness rather than the light, and in the darkness, so it is implied, they will remain.

4. So, too, finally, with heaven. Heaven is not here represented as if it were a beautiful palace beyond the clouds into which good men would be admitted after death. The house of

many mansions is not a material fabric in another world. It is a spiritual home in which all those who love Christ and keep His sayings dwell here and now. They may be harassed by the world's cares. They may have been ostracised by their fellow-men, expelled from the synagogues. Yet they may still dwell with Christ in the Father's house. He has prepared a place for them in this house. He has not left them orphaned or desolate. He has come to them and received them unto Himself. So, even while they remain upon the earth, they may truly be said to dwell in heaven. They do not, indeed, enjoy perfect bliss, for they are still pressed by temptation and conscious of sin. Yet they can rise above these passing evils and even now sit with Christ in the heavenly places.

Such is the teaching of this profound gospel. I can imagine a modern reader opposing to it some such objections as these. "This teaching," he might say, "is indeed the outcome of a profound and most spiritual philosophy. But is it not after all sad and disquieting? For does it not imply that we really know nothing of any world but this, that our present bliss

and our present misery constitute all our knowledge of heaven and hell, and that we are merely building, by the aid of these experiences, an imaginary world of whose existence we have no convincing evidence? And is this anything else than what agnostics and positivists mean when they bid us confine ourselves to what we see and know, and leave other spheres of being to the dreams of the imagination?"

To this I would reply by fully admitting that we have no means of access to the heavenly world as sure as those experiences of which we are now conscious while we endeavour to walk with Christ and to keep His sayings. The heavens are shut off from the earth by a curtain which has never been lifted, and as far as we can see never will be lifted. It does not appear as if we should ever know more of what that curtain hides than we know now. It does not appear that ampler knowledge would do us any good.

Yet we believe that these present experiences and mysterious intimations of a heavenly world are not mere illusions. We think there is such a world, utterly unable though we are to give it form and shape. We know that Christ has

passed into it and we humbly hope that we may ourselves follow Him, even as others have, who strove here to live in Him. We know, however, that our union with Christ hereafter depends upon our union with Him now. We know that year by year and day by day while we live, we are drawing nearer to Him or drifting farther apart. So we pray God that He will not leave us comfortless, but send His Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ has gone before, that we may ascend with Him in heart and mind into the heavenly places and with Him continually dwell.

THE LIFE ETERNAL.

“In my Father’s house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you.” S. JOHN xiv. 2.

It will not be questioned that the fullest revelation given to us in Scripture of the unseen world and our relation to it, is contained in those conversations of Jesus with His disciples, which reach from the 13th to the 17th chapter of the fourth gospel. Every verse and word in these chapters have been scrutinised and questioned by thousands anxious to obtain light upon the destiny of loved ones of whom death had bereaved them, or upon their own destiny when they too came to pass from the things seen to the things unseen.

It may seem almost a sacrilege to take one of the most hallowed of these sayings and attempt to displace the interpretation which, I do not doubt, most of us have been in the

habit of putting upon it. But close study of these chapters convinces us that the words have a far larger and richer meaning than a superficial reading of them would at all suggest.

- And as this meaning presents to us, in concise shape, our Lord's teaching regarding the heavenly world, I will ask your patient attention while I try to unfold it. The difficulty in grasping the teaching arises, not from the words in which it is expressed, for they are most simple, but from the effort we must make to disengage the words from misleading associations, and restore to them their original fulness of meaning.

Our Lord's object, in these sublime discourses, is to prepare His disciples for the time when they shall, with their bodily eyes, see Him no more; to familiarise them with the thought of this impending separation, and to show them how their sense of loss can be overcome. We might have thought that He would do this most effectually by making light of the days or the years which would intervene before they would rejoin Him in that heavenly world upon whose threshold He was now standing. So we may try to comfort

those who mourn, by telling them that life is short, death is certain, and that the moment of reunion with those they have loved will soon come. Our Lord here, however, follows a directly opposite course. The assurance He gives His disciples is not that they will come to Him, but that He will come to them, even while they still remain on the earth. He does not make little of this present life. Everything He says tends to emphasise its importance. Every promise contained in these chapters fixes the thoughts of the disciples upon their actual experience as the sphere in which it will receive its fulfilment.

Jesus assures them that although He will henceforth be beyond the reach of their bodily eyes, He will still "manifest" Himself to their spiritual vision. Although the world shall see Him no more, they shall "see" Him. Nay! they shall not only see Him. He and the Father will take up their abode with them and dwell in their hearts.

The promise thus given is expressed, as the conversations proceed, in two different forms. Sometimes Jesus speaks as if it is He Himself who shall come to the disciples, and sometimes

as if it is a Spirit of truth and righteousness who shall come in His place. His assurance in one place is "the Comforter shall come to you," in another place it is "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you." These, however, are not two different promises, but one and the same promise in two different forms.

What is conveyed in both alike is that Jesus, although withdrawn beyond the sight of His disciples, will still be within their reach, that He will still be with them, abiding within their hearts, as long as they continue to love Him and to keep His commandments. Various other assurances are given to them, all alike dependent upon the same simple condition. They who love Jesus and keep His sayings shall offer no prayers to the Father which shall not be answered. They shall do greater works even than Jesus Himself did, a promise fulfilled in the rapid spread of the faith of Christ over the world, and its victories over sin and despair. And they shall possess already as an actual present possession that eternal life which consists in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ, whom God has sent.

Now it is these loving and obedient disciples

who here and now shall occupy the place which Jesus goes to prepare for them in the Father's house. This house is not a material fabric, but a spiritual home, the abode of those who love and follow Jesus. You will remember how often in the New Testament Christians are said either to form God's household, or to be themselves His house or His temple, as where S. Paul addresses the Gentile Ephesians: "So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner-stone: in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." And in this gospel Jesus has previously made use of the same image, likening Himself to a son who dwells securely and without fear of being dispossessed in his father's house.

So He says here, "I go by the way of death and resurrection to make a secure abiding place for you in the great home of the Father. I go

to rob death of its sting, the grave of its victory. This place you will occupy while you love Me and keep My words. I and My Father will dwell with you, and you with us, in a spiritual home of which you will never again be deprived."

Let us pause for a moment to realise the immense effect such teaching would exercise upon those who were expecting the return of Christ to the earth or who felt the uncertainties in which, then as now, the future life is enveloped. To their questions regarding the time and the manner of Christ's Advent and the perfect state which He would establish, this divine gospel made answer: To him who loves Jesus and keeps His sayings, the Advent is past: Jesus has already come: the perfect state is already established. The loving and obedient disciple is already with Jesus where Jesus is. He does not build his hopes upon a convulsion to take place in the world without. His bliss proceeds from within. He has a habitation which cannot be moved.

Now this is heaven. To dwell with the Father and with Jesus is to dwell in heaven. To be where Jesus is, is to be in heaven. And

if we would arise to the full height to which Christian thought can raise us regarding heavenly happiness, it is thus we must think of it. We must recognise that such happiness can be, in some measure at least, our portion here and now, that the eternal life can begin here on the earth, that it is not an endless succession of years but a spiritual state, the portion of those who know God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

Here is a sufficient answer to the objections which have sometimes been urged against the Christian creed on the ground of the apparent selfishness of the Christian motive. Those who sacrifice present enjoyment or attractive prospects for Christ's sake have sometimes been taunted with the profitableness of the investment they appear to be making. It is said that they may well sacrifice time, if by so doing they hope to gain eternity, that the world is well lost if the skies are gained in compensation. To this we may reply that the most authoritative Christian teaching upon the heavenly world fixes in our minds one permanent thought regarding its happiness. It represents this happiness to have its source;

not in any external things, but in union with Christ, a union dependent upon love towards Him, and upon keeping His words. There is a sense, indeed, in which we may all be said to be selfish, for we all desire our own happiness and peace. The act of highest heroism is selfish in the sense that its author finds his highest happiness in the fulfilment of what he regards as his duty, even although it be at the cost of his life. The Christian desires happiness, and so far is selfish, but the happiness he is taught by his Lord to desire is this and this only—to be in heart and mind with Him. His hopes rest upon the promise of Christ. “If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there also shall my servant be.”

So in conformity with this teaching, we pray in our English Liturgy that we may ascend to heaven in heart and mind with Christ, and dwell with Him continually, so we ask God not to leave us comfortless, but to send His Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ has gone before, *i.e.* that He may now comfort us by bringing our thoughts into a present union

with the risen and glorified Christ. So the Apostle assures his readers that they may daily die with Christ and rise with Him, and by the lifting up of heart and life, enter with Him into the heavenly places. No doubt the pen and the pencil have often tried to make heaven visible to the eye of the flesh, as it is here revealed to the eye of the spirit. Nor can we deny that such pictures have their uses, and may serve as parables, stimulating the mind to reach for the realities of which they are only the symbols. So the heavenly city is represented in the Apocalypse as built of gold and pearl. So in the literature of the later Church, the senses have been again and again appealed to in order to assist the mind to grasp a bliss essentially spiritual and beyond the reach of the eye and the ear.

If, however, we would think of heaven as we are taught to do in these solemn discourses, we must not invoke the aid of any material images, whose power will naturally vary with taste and disposition, and we must think rather of a loving and obedient disciple of Jesus, lifting, perhaps in poverty and suffering, a penitent and yet trustful heart to One

who is felt to be full of compassion and closely near. There is heaven. There Jesus has come. There the disciple is occupying the place prepared for him in his Father's house.

Nor should we confound this conception of heaven with that figurative use of the word with which we are familiar in imaginative literature, as when the poet speaks of all heaven being brought before his eyes as he listened to the solemn music. There are indeed emotional and intellectual pleasures so keen and exalted that men, surrendering themselves wholly to these, may find, for a time at least, in their enjoyment all the satisfaction they desire. So a great scholar* of the last generation, reviewing his life, said : "I have made use of the days and the years that have been given to me, to live in intimacy with the great minds of all ages. . . . Without asking who I was, or whence I came, they admitted me to their company. They opened to me their volumes ; they let me read their thoughts, their secrets : in their society I forgot the bad days which

* Mark Pattison, *Memoirs*, quoting from Quinet, *Histoire de mes Idées*.

gathered over me." The heaven of enjoyment, here indicated, however, imposes upon us no duties towards others, nor does it make their welfare in any way our concern. I may enjoy the happiness of the student or the musician or the artist while I lead a wholly secluded and self-centred life. Indeed, such a life seems to be the one best adapted for such enjoyment. Whereas, we must observe that the heaven opened to us in these chapters can be the portion of no one who is not willing to wash the feet of his brethren, to love his fellow-men with something of the love of Christ. The most unhappy periods in the Church's whole history have been perhaps the ages succeeding the revival of learning when her priests and princes forgot the duties they owed to the poor and the unfortunate in the pursuit of literary and artistic enjoyment. "A new commandment," the Divine Speaker solemnly assures us, "I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you that ye also love one another." "Ye cannot be my disciples except ye have love one to another."

You will, however, certainly press the question: How are we to think of death? Shall

we keep our thoughts fixed upon this present world, its urgent duties, its engrossing pursuits, its keen and varied pleasures, and shut out the prospect of what lies beyond it ? We cannot, brethren, do this if we would. We receive too many warnings, as life advances, of the nearness and the certainty of death to allow us to forget it. Our own tenure of life is pitifully insecure. And before we ourselves receive the summons to go hence, we shall learn perhaps more than once what the bereaving power of death means. Jesus Himself did not make light of death. On the contrary, He showed many times, as when He wept at the grave of His friend, that He recognised its terrifying and distressing aspects.

But let us suppose that a man has learnt the lesson which Jesus here tries to teach His disciples, that he has striven to love Christ and to keep His sayings, is it not certain that such a man will be least dismayed by death when it visits his home or lessens the number of his friends, will be best fitted to meet it when its stern call comes to himself ? He has made for himself, so to speak, a home in the heavenly world. He has ascended repeatedly in heart

and mind into this world. He knows that Jesus and the Father are there, whose will and words he has striven, although amidst many failures and lapses, to keep. He may dare to hope to be reunited in the Father's wide home to those whom he has lost. He is indeed keenly sensible of the darkness in which everything that lies beyond the grave is enveloped. He can but feel that he sees through a glass darkly. His vision is blurred and confused by the medium through which he looks. Yet he knows that he cannot pass beyond the reach of the love of God, who even now condescends to dwell in such a humble temple as the heart of man.

I honestly believe, brethren, that in this teaching lies the answer to all doubts, the removal of all perplexities. It has been the consolation, in every age of the Church, of those who have realised that the only access to religious truth lay through obedience to the Divine will. Holding fast to this teaching, we can remain unmoved amidst the advance of secular knowledge and the fluctuations of opinion, because we have the assurance within ourselves of an eternal life already begun. We

are already in heart and mind with Jesus, and no material change can destroy that house not made with hands which has been built and made by God, and is thus eternal in the heavens.

THE WITNESS OF MEMORY TO IMMORTALITY.

“The just shall be had in everlasting remembrance.”

PSALM cxii. 6.

THE present, as has often been said, is a mere vanishing speck between two eternities. Behind us is the illimitable sea, of which only a small section is illuminated by the light of history, which we call the past. In front is the equally limitless expanse of the future.

The hope of immortality is an endeavour on our part to lay hold of those years that are yet to come. We project ourselves into the future, and imagine ourselves to be still living ages hence. Out of this hope arise some of our very deepest and most anxious questionings. What is the immortality we crave for? Is it only that our present life should know no cessation? Or is it a desire for a life higher and fuller than our imaginations are

at all able to picture? Is it that some great reality, utterly beyond us as we are, is throwing by these hopes its shadow upon our present pathway?

These questions can hardly fail to suggest to us that we already possess a faculty which enables us to hold the past, just as in our cravings for immortality we desire to hold the future, I mean the faculty of memory. By this we can transport ourselves into years that lie far behind us. We can revive scenes that have vanished. We can restore the dead to life. These achievements bear an obvious resemblance to the objects of our own hopes for the future. As the past now is, so the present will be. Thus we are taught what is worthy of remembrance and what we may be content to forget.

We may thus appeal to the past to teach us what the immortality really is which we desire. The things in it which we love to recall, which we find worthy of remembrance, are obviously the things for whose perpetuity we may and ought to hope.

I would urge these two propositions: (1) that it is not the past, as it was, that is worthy

of perpetual remembrance, but only the past purified from its earthly alloy, freed from its blots and disfigurements ; and (2) that the Psalmist was guided by a true instinct when he singled out justice as possessing especially among human characteristics the mark of immortality.

My first contention is that the very best men have in their composition traits belonging to the earth which are best allowed to pass into oblivion.

One of the most pathetic and instructive incidents in the whole history of religion is the attempt of the French mathematician and philosopher, Comte, to perpetuate among his disciples the memory of the dead. He thought that the great conception of God had become too abstract and indistinct for the purposes of practical religion, and that Humanity might take its place as an object of worship.

To present humanity in the necessary radiance he drew up a calendar which should recall for every day of the year some illustrious person whose services to his fellow-creatures were then to be gratefully passed in review.

He took the utmost pains to make such review of real spiritual value, and with this object he issued a number of directions which are full of suggestiveness.

He directed his followers to fix with precision in their minds first the place, then the favourite seat or attitude, and lastly the dress of the person to be remembered until the image had acquired strength and clearness. When they had done this he instructed them to throw the bodily element in the object of their remembrance as far as possible into the background and fix their attention upon his moral and intellectual qualities. The worshipper was to try to forget the defects of the dead, and to recall only their good qualities until they became so idealised that they ennobled his feelings and stirred him to action. So, to use the philosopher's own words, "the dead do not cease to live and to think in us and by us," "the present glorifies the past the better to prepare the future." *

So whatever be the debt we owe to the past, we must all admit that the entire personality,

* *Catechism of Positive Religion*, quoted by Dr. Walter Lock, *The Bible and Christian Life*.

the whole being even of the most illustrious dead, is not worthy of perpetual remembrance. It is not the whole man or the entire life we desire to recall. It is certain features only we wish to rescue from oblivion.

Indeed, if we do not make this separation the recollection, even of the wisest and best, may do us positive injury. We may make their prejudices, their mistaken views of truth, into an ideal standard for ourselves so as to say: I am quite content to live and die as those before me did whom I so greatly love and honour: I ask nothing better than to be as they were. This would be a mistaken sentiment. For we have, it may well be, knowledge and advantages of many kinds denied to them. If they were still with us perhaps we should find their opinions on many points to have changed. It is not that we judge them as though we were better than they. Possessed of our advantages they might rise far above us. Still, upon the lives of them all, upon their thoughts and actions, is ever stamped in some measure the impress of time. They were creatures of time, even as we are, confined within the limitations of a particular

place and a particular age. We may not regard any of them as an infallible master, any one of their lives as in all respects our pattern.

So when we recall their memory we allow something always to fall away. It is only what is good we desire to retain. May we not say, then, that it is the wisdom and goodness of God displayed in these earthly forms which we wish to hold in remembrance? He makes frail earthen vessels for a time the receptacles of His treasure. Again, He breaks the vessels without allowing the treasure to perish. This, I believe, is what we mean when we say that the blessed dead "live in God." We mean that all which they derived from Him, and which was free of earthly alloy lives. Nothing else lives. Nothing else ought to live.

So we humbly hope it may be with ourselves. We do not desire the perpetuation of our whole personality. We wish that the gold—if gold indeed there be—should be separated from the dross and placed among the Divine jewels. So we receive with joy the Apostle's assurance that we sow not the

body that shall be, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor the corruptible see incorruption. We wish not that the whole man, but only that in it which is good, should be kept in perpetual remembrance.

And this is surely no vain or presumptuous wish. One of our strongest convictions is the belief that force is perpetual. We believe that it undergoes endless transformations, but that it is not diminished. What is lost as heat reappears as light or as motion. The entire store is not affected. Surely the goodness which we are uplifted and strengthened even to remember is likewise force, and will not be allowed to perish. It may receive new shapes. It may be utilised in ways we cannot conceive, but it will not be extinguished. “They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.”

This I conceive to be the hope of immortality. We may think we desire other things. But when we place them distinctly before us we discover them to be illusions. Who would wish to live his whole life over again? Who would wish to keep every part of it in per-

petual remembrance? What we really desire is what the Apostle, speaking in human language, called a "new body," a being or personality which shall stand to our present one in the relation in which the grain stands to the seed. We desire that everything in us which is of the earth earthy, everything carnal, unsubstantial, pretentious, shall fall away from us and be forgotten, and that our real and true self shall be clothed upon, so that mortality may indeed be swallowed up of life.

And it was especially for justice that the Psalmist predicted this immortal destiny, "The just," he said, "shall be had in everlasting remembrance."

Let us not attach to this word any merely legal or forensic sense. The words righteousness and justice are in the Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament, equivalent terms, and if there were in the English language any verb which stood to righteousness in the relation in which justify stands to justice, the former term and its derivatives might throughout have displaced the latter.

What, then, is a just man? A just man, I would answer, is one who has sufficient intel-

lectual and moral detachment to be able to separate himself from his own feelings and opinions, and thus perceive what is due to others, even although he may be widely removed from them.

Justice is thus in its highest forms the equivalent of some of the most exalted of human virtues. It is impartiality in an historian. It is equity in a judge. It is foresight in a statesman. And it was this which was made by the Divine Lawgiver the foundation and the motive of all human action when He said to His disciples: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do also unto them." This was the characteristic which moved the centurion as he stood by the Cross to say, "Truly this was a righteous—or, as the word might equally well be rendered, a just—man."

A just man is thus merciful in his judgments, deliberate in his actions, on his guard both against obstinacy and against the surrender of principle, and he is invariably courteous and considerate. He never allows himself to take liberties with others. His character and bearing are such that others

never feel disposed to take liberties with him.

This in its very highest form is the characteristic we see shining forth from the life of Him whom we own as Master and Saviour. He did not group men into classes and make a whole class the object of indiscriminating praise or blame: He separated man from man, recognising the individuality of each. He had one word for the young man with great possessions, another for the Pharisee who reserved his courtesies for the great and distinguished, yet another for the poor woman taken in sin. Nay, we love to think that He gave an evidence of justice higher than these: that He left the peace of the eternal world that He might share the troubled lot of man, that He had such compassion for our wayward, distracted race as to be willing to die, the just for the unjust.

This is the quality which above all others has the promise of immortality. I do not say that the person who displays it, even in a conspicuous degree, is perpetually remembered, for we can raise no enduring monuments to ourselves, but the justice itself does not perish. It raises up other men in long succession to

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emulate and perpetuate it. So it is a light whose splendour ever increases, even as it is written, “The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

IV. CHRISTIAN WORSHIP.

THE HOUSE OF GOD.*

“Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.”

GEN. xxviii. 16.

IN all times men have thought that there was a world beyond the clouds untouched by sin and sorrow. It has been their steady belief also that this world was not impenetrably shut off from the earth, but that communication between the two worlds was possible. The Jewish people looked back to a far-off time, lying beyond the confines of exact history when visitants from the heavenly spheres had trodden the earth, and had held familiar intercourse with their ancestors.

We may conceive this heavenly world now in a different fashion from that which it bore in early ages. We may not be able to think of it so firmly as having a precise location. We

* Preached on Trinity Sunday, on the occasion of the anniversary of a church.

may call it sometimes the ideal world, meaning by this to separate it from the blemishes which we find in the world we know. But I think we are as firmly convinced as was any previous age that there is such a world, and that we are still within reach of its calls and its consolations.

Still there is an important difference between our habits of thought on the subject and those of primitive times. For we have familiarised ourselves much more than they had with the thought that the heavenly world becomes clear or fades away into the mist in proportion as our own minds grow in strength and in purity. When faith is strong and thought is vigorous and hope is fervent, then the heavenly world comes so near that we can almost see its bulwarks and count its towers. When our minds are clouded over by sin or by sorrow then heaven eludes our grasp and fades into the light of common day. This is what the poet meant when he said that the mind was its own place and could make a hell of heaven, a heaven of hell. Yet access to the heavenly world is not denied to us, and we are convinced that God Himself, from His unseen and holy place, does still visit the earth,

and by means of the good thoughts and desires which He puts into our minds does uplift and bless us.

Here we see a wanderer lying down upon the bare earth under the open sky in a spot which is described as distinguished by no feature of beauty or sublimity. There is nothing to attract the eye or fire the imagination. As he sleeps the slabs of rock which lie around him arrange themselves into a mystic stair, and when he awakes he pronounces with deep awe and conviction the commonplace scene to be the very House of God and the gate of heaven. What is it that has effected the wondrous transformation? It is from his thoughts in his dreams the transfiguring touch has come. It is these which have made the bare earth to be a holy temple. Always it is the worshipper who makes the sanctuary.

So, too, there have been many moments in the history of the world when men have felt that the whole earth had become a holy place, that God was really walking in their midst, moving and shaking the hearts of nations by influences unmistakably heavenly and divine. Far the most memorable of these visitations

was the appearance in the same part of the world in which this wanderer was now sleeping of One who during His short life attracted, comparatively speaking, but little attention, but in whom future generations saw God's very image and likeness. So lasting was the impression made by His simple life and tragic death, so plainly did men during these few years see the heavens opened, that the very ground on which He trod has ever since been counted holy in spite of the countless desecrations to which in the course of the ages it has been subjected. The light of this life and death still streams upon us, and we endeavour to walk as faithfully as we can in its radiance.

So, too, there are in our separate lives times and seasons when, although God remains as ever invisible, we feel that He is near.

The occasions in our lives when we are thus visited and shaken by thoughts and desires which we recognise to be from heaven may perhaps be arranged in three distinct groups :

1. We feel, like Jacob, that the heavens have been opened and that God is visiting us when any truth affecting our entire life is so brought home to us that we for the first time see and

grasp it. No truth really influences us until we can so far lay hold of it with our intelligence as to be able to realise it and make it our own. We may not indeed be able to see its full scope, but as long as it remains simply unintelligible so long it remains inefficacious. A teacher in the thirteenth century is said to have deeply stirred a large part of Christendom by unfolding in its various consequences this simple proposition, "Nothing can be believed until it is first understood." This proposition remains as true now as it was then. Truth remains inefficacious until we feel and realise and comprehend it. We may assent to it previously. But it has no hold upon our hearts and lives. And this, I believe, is one reason why the great Christian verities seem now so often powerless, and why so many absent themselves from the worship of our churches. It is that they cannot feel and comprehend these verities in the way in which they are commonly expressed. They ask, Who is this God in whom you ask us to believe ? Where is the heaven and the hell of which you speak to us ? What is the immortality for which you bid us hope ? These are the questions which we

of the clergy must answer—answer in such a way that we shall be understood, not merely by students and philosophers, but by busy men and women. And it is because the answer, although it can be given, is yet so hard to give that the Gospel of Christ, true though it be, has become well-nigh meaningless and unintelligible to thousands, not of irreligious but of religious men and women. This, I believe, is the position of large numbers in all countries at the present moment. They can neither be said to believe nor yet to disbelieve. They are in a position midway between the two. Like the disciples in the Gospel, they doubt even while they worship. They doubt whether the form on which their mind's eye is fixed is not the creature of their own fancy. And when this form draws near to them so that they can recognise it, when they are able not merely to see the outward form of Jesus, but to hear His message to themselves, when they are able to say of God with Job, “Before I heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee,” then indeed they feel that God has visited them, and say, “This is the House of God, this is the gate of heaven.”

2. Again we utter the exclamation of Jacob when we are brought into the presence of some higher conception of duty, some nobler moral ideal than we had hitherto known. It is with us individual men as with the ages of the world. We do not at the time perceive the faultiness of our own standards. We are surprised, horrified, at some of the practices in which our forefathers contentedly acquiesced. One of the leaders of the Evangelical revival, the friend of the poet Cowper, the Rev. John Newton, a man who awakened many souls, has left it on record that he never enjoyed hours of sweeter communion with God than when he was engaged in his voyages as a slave trader to and from the coast of Guinea. This sounds in our ears as flagrant blasphemy. That a man should talk of holding communion with God when he had in the hold of his vessel some hundred wretched beings whom he had torn from their homes and was carrying away to life-long slavery is to us shameless hypocrisy. Newton, however, used the words in all good faith, not suspecting that there was even inconsistency in his conduct, so greatly has the moral standard risen, in this respect at least,

in the intervening years. We cannot doubt that those who fill our places a hundred years hence will be surprised at some of the practices in which we now contentedly acquiesce and will wonder how we were able to reconcile them with our religious beliefs. And this holds true of us all separately. We often live, thank God, to be heartily ashamed of our actions or omissions in bygone years. We hope, we believe, that we should do better now, that we should show a larger charity, clearer discernment, a less captious, a more liberal spirit. And when our minds are thus lifted up towards a better and a nobler life, lifted up either by the example of one of our fellow-men, or by some spoken or written word, then indeed has the heavenly Christ manifested Himself to us, then indeed does He call us. We are in God's presence, at heaven's gate.

3. And once again we repeat the experience of Jacob when our hearts are moved or torn by any strong emotion such as sorrow, or apprehension, or joy, which has the effect of breaking down the partition that hides from us the vast silent spaces by which our life is encompassed.

Around us is the infinite deep, the eternity from which we came, to which we are hastening, and ever and anon there are borne in upon our ears voices from the far country. We are in the House of God, on the threshold of the eternal world, when we sit in the sick-room, not knowing when the veiled shadow will enter that keeps the keys of all the creeds, when we receive some premonition of the dread summons we all shall hear, or when we stand by the open grave of friend or kinsman. It was by suffering the Captain of our Salvation was made perfect, and it is by sorrow that the capacities of the spirits of many of His brethren have been unfolded.

In these various forms as we pass along the thoroughfare of life, we may know the experience of Jacob and feel that a transfiguring touch has passed over the place where we are, and that the commonplace scene has become as the House of God and the gate of heaven.

And material churches, buildings set apart for the express worship of God, are places where we should expect to meet with Him under these various forms, where we should

find new truths revealed to us or old truths lit up with fresh meaning, where a better and nobler life than that of the world should be presented to us, and where those stern and awful experiences by which we are all visited should be unfolded and made plain.

In as far as churches serve any or all of these purposes they are real houses of God—meeting-places between Him who dwelleth not in temples made with hands and the creatures He has made. If they do not serve these purposes they are not ladders to connect the heaven with the earth, because they are not visited by that Divine Presence by which alone an earthly building may become holy ground. These purposes churches fulfil quite irrespective of their grandeur or their beauty. An insignificant church may attain the end of its being while a great church fails to do so. A homely or a mean church may receive the Divine blessing denied to the great cathedral. For always it is the two or three gathered together in the name of Christ who make the place of their worship to be holy ground.

So, as we leave the fabric in which we are

now assembled on this Sunday consecrated to the threefold name of God, let us carry with us, to our great consolation, this truth concerning the Divine nature.

Let us remember that He is still near us and with us even when we are least conscious of His presence. We go about our affairs. We eat and sleep. And all the while this mysterious Power accompanies and enfolds us. He is quite independent of the representations we form of Him and the names we give Him. Sometimes we acknowledge Him, sometimes we disregard Him, sometimes we disown and deny Him. Yet He pursues His purposes uninfluenced by our heedlessness or our disloyalty, even although He may be grieved by them. Then there come moments of unusual feeling, when our souls are stirred by sorrow or thankfulness, and He seems to become visible, and we become conscious of His presence. But He is not really nearer to us at these moments than when we are quite oblivious of Him. Surely in this assurance of His unfailing presence lies our surest hope for time and eternity. If we climb up into heaven He is there, if we go down into hell He is

there also. We may, nay, we must trust Him, and yield ourselves up to what we perceive to be His purposes, feeling sure that what He requires must be the best possible for ourselves and the world.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER.

“Brethren, pray for us.”

1 THESS. v. 25.

INTERCESSORY prayer has in all ages taken a prominent place in Christian devotion. Christians when they knelt in prayer have put forward the needs of their brethren often before their own. S. Paul begins most of his epistles by assuring his correspondents that he makes incessant mention of them in his prayers, and not seldom he asks them to pray for him.

The practice of intercessory prayer has for Christians the highest of all sanctions, inasmuch as it is suggested by the teaching, as well as by the example, of the Lord Himself. We cannot suppose that, during the many hours which He is recorded to have spent in prayer, His mind was dwelling mainly, if it dwelt at all, upon His own needs. We may

be sure that it was full of the welfare of those whom He had come to serve, and for whom He was about to offer His life. Nor can it escape us that in the prayer which He set before His disciples as a model the petitions are all expressed in the first person plural, and thus made to convey the needs of others as well as those of the actual suppliant. Thus we are not surprised to find intercessory prayer an invariable incident of the Christian life from the Church's first days to our own.

Yet prayer in this form is undoubtedly beset in an unusual degree by the difficulties which the reason opposes to prayer in every form. We are ready to recognise the blessings which prayer brings to the person himself who prays, the increased calmness and courage and resolution with which he rises from his knees. But how can his prayer avail his friend who is far away from him? Nay, how can it avail the dead, and yet for them, too, it was the Church's habit almost from the first to pray?

To these questions we can only make the general answer that prayer is the result of an irresistible impulse of the human soul. Men have prayed in all times and places because

an instinct stronger than they has compelled them. They have not stopped to justify their act at the tribunal of reason, nor to consider the gain they would derive from it. They have prayed with the same involuntariness as they have loved and wished and hoped. And inasmuch as they were united to one another by the most intimate ties, and in a true sense members one of another, so they have prayed for each other's welfare, and have even followed their dead kinsmen and friends into the unseen world with hopes and prayers.

Still, wherever the light falls there the shadows fall also, and this most unselfish of practices has not failed to become the prey of superstition, and to be traded upon by cupidity.

The distinction between unselfish intercession for those we love and a superstitious desire to win God's favour by the intercessions of those purer and better than ourselves is made very plain by the incident related in one of our lessons this morning, and to which I have once before drawn your attention.

The Samaritan magician Simon, seeing the effects which followed upon the laying on of the Apostles' hands, attributed a miraculous

efficacy to the act itself, and thus not unnaturally thought that he might purchase the power to repeat what he saw. The Apostle sternly rebuked him, and bade him pray the Lord if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him. To this Simon answered and said, "Pray ye for me to the Lord that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me."

Evidently the thought in his mind was, "Pray ye for me, for I am not good enough to pray for myself. My prayers have no chance of being listened to by the Most High. But it is not so with yours. Do you therefore for me what I cannot do for myself. Enter the awful presence chamber while I remain waiting outside."

There is an unmistakable difference between the state of soul here revealed and the Apostle's when he said, "Brethren, pray for us."

To the Apostle prayer was the breath of action, the direction of a man's heart towards God while his hands and feet were fulfilling the Divine behests. He asked his spiritual children to pray for him, because he felt sure of a place in their hearts when they lifted

them upwards towards God. His soul was knit to theirs by ties of the utmost possible closeness. To the magician, on the other hand, prayer was an incantation which possessed an inherent miraculous efficacy.

So the Church's intercessory prayers began to lose their early beauty and to degenerate into superstitious forms, when these prayers were separated from work and regarded as efficacious in themselves. The Christians of the apostolic age prayed for their brethren, because they had the welfare of their brethren very much at heart. They exposed this pre-occupation of their minds, as they did every other, before God's eyes. The verbal prayer was the utterance of that brotherly love which filled their souls, and which expressed itself in every form of unselfish action. It never occurred to them, we may safely say, to separate work from prayer, still less to think that prayer could take the place of work.

So the words of the Lord's Prayer constrain us by their very form to ask ourselves what we are doing to give effect to our wishes—“Am I showing forgiveness to those who

have wronged me? Am I doing anything to procure daily bread for those on whose behalf, as well as on my own, I pray?"

Whereas once prayer was separated from work its degradation began. It was thought that intercessions could be purchased by money. Men imagined, even with the Prodigal Son before their eyes, that they dared not themselves enter the Divine presence chamber, and that they must hire others holier than themselves to be their representatives.

True it is that the unworldliness of the hermits and recluses of the early Church must have carried its message to many a sinful heart. The prayers of these recluses for the world they had quitted did not, we may believe, return to them void. Still, we must acknowledge that intercessory prayer such as this—prayer separated from effort—the substitute for work and not its consecration—is something quite distinct from the intercessions of our Lord and His Apostles.

I have read of a just comment made upon what was once an ordinary form of grace after meat: "Lord relieve the wants of others and make us thankful for all Thy mercies." "That

is to say," the criticism was, "you thank God for all that He has done for yourselves; and, as for others, well, you hope God will take care of them too." "Nay, you ought not to say, 'Lord, relieve the wants of others,' but 'Lord, teach us to relieve the wants of others.'" And those who offered prayer for others as a substitute for active exertions on their behalf had no right to expect that such a substitute would either be effectual or accepted.

But if prayer be the solemn utterance before God of a man's hope and effort then there could be no better evidence of his nearness to Christ than that the needs of his brethren should fill the largest place in his prayers. What plainer sign of unselfishness could there be than this? It would imply that his mind was dwelling so little upon purely personal interests that these, in his highest moments, when he lifted up his soul to God, fell naturally into the background. And this was plainly the state of soul of S. Paul and those of his converts who were really possessed by that revelation of God made to man in Christ. They prayed for each other because they

thought perpetually of each other. They had the most lively sense of brotherhood, and they knew that when one member suffered or rejoiced all the members had reason for sorrow or joy.

There is no more instructive or sadder spectacle than to watch the gradual deterioration which the teachings of our Lord and His immediate Apostles suffered when those teachings came to be interpreted by ordinary men. What was for Him spiritual became for them material. What was spontaneous became mechanical. The movements of the living soul were buried and checked as the ripples of a stream when the water freezes.

Thus it was most natural that Christians, conscious of the communion of saints, should often think of the saintly persons who had passed away from the earth and should entreat their prayers. Yet we can perceive a marked difference between asking the living to pray for us and making a similar request to the dead. For the warfare of the dead is accomplished. They are not, as we are, immersed in the troubles of this life and threatened by its

temptations. We inevitably think of them as nearer to God than we are, possessing that for which we only strive, knowing that at which we only guess. So history bears emphatic witness that the practice of entreating the prayers of the saintly dead has been attended by two evil consequences. It has made the heart of the righteous sad by suggesting that others are more ready to hear prayer than God Himself, and it has strengthened the hands of the wicked by inducing them to believe that they can be absolved from their offences on easier terms elsewhere than at the bar of the Infinite Justice. Thus it was perhaps well that the English Reformers removed all such invocations from our Liturgy as it is now authorised for use.

Perhaps we may say that prayer in all its forms will be well pleasing to God as long as we remember what prayer essentially is. It is an uplifting of the human heart, desirous of light or peace or pardon, to the eternal mercy-seat, even as the Psalmist said, "Show thou me the way that I should walk in, for I lift up my soul unto thee." The heart may move the lips to speak or they may remain speechless.

The prayer is not the less real because it is unspoken.

“ Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire
Uttered or unexpressed,
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.”

One might kneel three times a day in his chamber, like Daniel, and repeat some hallowed form of words, and yet there might be no prayer. Another might look upwards to the source of light and remain speechless, not knowing how to pray as he ought, yet his unspoken request would not, we may feel sure, pass unheard or unanswered.

If this essentially spiritual nature of prayer be borne in mind, I do not think the question whether we may lawfully pray for the dead will cause us any perplexity.

If such prayer were a sin, it has been truly said * to be a sin, which it is almost impossible not to commit when we lose one whose name it had been our constant habit to mention in our prayers. In spite of theory, the loved

* By Dr. Salmon, *Evolution and other Papers*. The sermon was suggested by two of these papers on the subject of Intercessory Prayer. I have availed myself of many of the writer’s words in the above paragraph.

name will rise to the lips, and are we then bound to suppress the yearnings of desire or be afraid that these should be known to the Father in heaven? In some such way prayers for the dead arose in the early Church. When leading men died whose names had been habitually mentioned in the public prayers of the Church, the sudden omission of these names seemed a denial of the belief that they were still living in Christ. The first prayers for the dead were, we may believe, the inarticulate cry of a bleeding heart pleading for a blessing from God without knowing in what form it was to be given, or why it was needed. But when such prayers became mere tradition of the past men began to theorise as to the purposes they were to serve. Dark imaginings arose of torments to be suffered after death by those who had died in the Lord, and of the alleviations of such torments which might be purchased by the bequests of terrified invalids or the gifts of their sorrowing friends. The abuses thus arising became so great that we can hardly regret the entire removal of prayers for the dead from the public offices.

I will conclude with one word as to the

practice of prayer. It is with this as with the other phases of the Christian life. The worth of prayer can only be known by making actual trial of it. If it often degenerates into a lifeless routine, none the less is it true that He who prayed without ceasing would all his life long be walking with God. Pray then in the form of your choice. Pray in silence or pray in words, but pray in either case earnestly, realising the Divine presence. Pray if it may be morning, noon and night. Pray for yourself and your brethren, that you and they may perceive God's will, and that you may have strength to fulfil it.

THE EUCHARIST.

I. ITS INSTITUTION.

“Are ye able to drink the cup that I drink? And they said unto him, We are able.”

S. MARK x. 38, 39 (part).

EVERY religion has some one rite which discloses its inmost meaning and utters its distinctive call. This place in the faith of Christ is filled by that ordinance which has borne different names in different ages—the Supper of the Lord, the Communion, the Mass—but which is generally designated in history as the Eucharist. Through their entire history Christians have met together to eat bread and to drink wine in memory of the last solemn supper of Jesus. This is the only outward observance peculiar to Christians. Men of all creeds, meet together at regular intervals to worship God. They all engage in public and private prayer. But if we saw men eating

bread and drinking wine together as a religious act we might be sure that we were in a Christian assembly. The history of the Eucharist is thus almost co-extensive with the history of Christianity. To trace the Eucharist through all its changes would be to write the history of the Christian Church.

I propose, if I should be permitted, on the Sunday mornings in Lent, to touch—for I can hardly do more—upon some of the more important incidents of this history.

To-day I go back to its starting-point,—the solemn supper in which Christ pronounced the bread on the table to be His body and the wine to be His blood.

Yet, indeed, we cannot rightly call this supper the starting-point of the Eucharist. I do not merely mean that the partaking of food at a common table has in all times and places been held to have something of a sacred character and to be a pledge of mutual fellowship. I mean that the supper during which the Eucharist was instituted was, as we can see, only the last of many common meals in which Christ had been in the habit of joining with His disciples. The two disciples who

walked together to Emmaus on the first Easter afternoon had not been present at the last Supper, and yet they recognised their mysterious companion by the way in which He brake the bread. We infer from this that He had been in the habit of attaching some symbolical meaning to this breaking of bread, making it, in all probability, expressive of the unity which bound Him and His followers together in a common faith and a common hope.

The last supper, however, plainly distinguished itself from the others which had gone before, by its occasion and by the memorable words spoken while it proceeded. It took place on the evening before the death of Christ. He joined in it, as all the indications show, with the consciousness of impending crisis pressing upon His mind. He knew that His hour had come. This knowledge did not require on His part supernatural foresight. His enemies had at this moment resolved upon His arrest, and one of the disciples at least knew of their resolve. He himself had begun His last journey to the capital of His race, foreseeing that this would be its issue. He

had spoken in the city in such a way as to embitter hostility, and almost to invite violence. Thus the shadow of coming danger and decisive fulfilment rested upon Him, and imparted a solemnity beyond ordinary to His words while He joined in this supper.

In spite of the statements of the first three Evangelists it seems clear that His supper was not the ordinary Passover supper of the Jews—the meal in which all the members of a family were bidden to join to commemorate the nation's departure from Egypt. This is suggested by the fact that there is no mention of any lamb being on the table at our Lord's supper, whereas this was the most prominent dish at the Jewish feast. S. John also tells us expressly that the Passover supper had not yet taken place when our Lord expired upon the Cross. We consequently conclude that this supper was only the last of many common meals, at morning, mid-day, and evening.

Still, although it was not the actual Passover supper it was the Passover season, and the associations of the Passover encompassed the Master and His followers. The most solemn night of the Jewish year was at hand to remind

them of the great things which God had done for His people in the days of old, and to assure them that He had not forgotten to be gracious, nor shut up His loving-kindness in displeasure.

Possessed by these feelings, in which joy and sorrow, hope and apprehension, memory and anticipation, played each its part, Christ and His twelve intimate companions sat down to meat. There was no outward accessory—the creation of wealth, the contrivance of fancy—to impart a fictitious dignity to this simple supper. The room and the board and the cushions for the guests to recline on were, we may be sure, such as might have been seen this night in many a house in Jerusalem. Yet no banquet of man's contrivance equals this simple meal in grandeur, no eloquence uttered at such banquets approaches the few words recorded to have been spoken at this supper in its hold upon the heart and the imagination of mankind, so true is it that dignity and indeed beauty are essentially spiritual things. If they do not radiate from the spirit outwards they cannot be created by the most lavish display of wealth. If the guests at the board have no inherent delicacy and elevation, in vain the

costly viands, the ornaments of gold and silver. In the course of the supper, Christ, taking in His holy and venerable hands, as an old liturgy expresses it, the round cake, breaking it and giving a portion to each of His disciples, solemnly pronounced it to be His body, and handing them the cup, containing wine mixed with water—for wine was never drunk pure in those days—declared it to be His blood—or to repeat His words, as they are recorded in the earliest Gospel, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many.”

What did He mean? Now, we should observe that the words were by no means as strange and startling to the disciples as they are to us. There were probably in their minds many associations which lit up the words with meaning but which we no longer possess. One of their prophets, speaking of a Divine message written upon a roll, said, “Then did I eat it, and it was in my mouth honey for sweet-ness,” meaning that he had taken the message into his very heart and made it a part of himself. And wine had very frequently* been described as the “blood” of the grape. We must also remember that a covenant in ancient

times was ratified by the sprinkling of blood ; an animal was sacrificially slain and its blood was sprinkled upon the altar and upon the two contracting parties.

Bearing, then, these associations in mind, we interpret these solemn words of Christ as follows :

Our Lord was now about to offer His life for the establishment among men of the Divine kingdom. He was about to lay down His life and bring many into the kingdom, and to reconcile them to the Father who loved them. He believed that His death was a necessary step towards the accomplishment of this great purpose. Looking forward in assured faith and hope He saw the kingdom already established. He anticipated a more glorious feast, a table spread with immortal bread, a cup overflowing with new and better wine. "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine," He told His disciples, "until I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

So, pointing His disciples towards this transcendent fulfilment, He said, I in the meantime am the food of your souls, your stay in the present, your hope for the future. As really

as your lips press this material bread, your spirits at this moment are mingling with mine. We are bound together in a union of inexpressible closeness.

The union of which He spoke was one that already existed. They did not become His body by eating the bread. They were already His body—members of which He was the head, branches of which He was the stem.

It is in this sense we may hear Him addressing the question to us after the lapse of ages in our changed situation, “Are you able to drink of the cup that I drink of?”

What is it that can alone enable us to answer, Yes, we are able?

We cannot hope to revive in ourselves those exalted and indeed unique emotions which filled the mind of Christ at this supreme moment. We are immersed in the cares and anxieties of the world. We are not as He was. We are only learning to be like Him. Nor can we feel towards Him exactly as did those intimate companions who had looked on His face and seen it many a time kindle with a heavenly radiance. Such intimate communion is hardly attainable except perhaps by some spirit

here and there whom God has especially gifted.

Yet communion with Christ, as He here reveals Himself, is still possible to us. We can in some measure share the faith and the hope by which His soul was filled. If there is no such participation, then communion there cannot be. If it were possible for us to stand on the high eminence on which He stood, then indeed there would be full communion between us and Him.

What then, once more, is the state of soul which He here discloses to us in Himself and which He invites us to share?

First, it is one of unbounded confidence that the Divine promises cannot fail, that the final result of the whole world-process, the last outcome of the travail of creation, will be a kingdom undisturbed by sin and sorrow, a city which shall need no earthly luminary to enlighten it, because God Himself shall be its everlasting light. In this confidence death itself is accepted or even welcomed. The soul looks beyond it with calm, unfaltering gaze. Here then, in the first place, is hope or faith steadfast and unassailable.

In the second place, there is that strong social love which found expression in the declaration, This is my body, or, Ye are my body, for the two phrases are almost equivalent in meaning. Here is the love which is the foundation of all corporate life, which binds men together in families and nations and churches, the cement of every stable union, the only preservative of human society while society shall last.

Imagine, then, what the world would be if every Christian could only communicate with Christ in this real communication, if he could go about his daily work uplifted by this firm confidence in goodness, bound to his fellow-men by this heartfelt charity. Strife and warfare would be no longer possible. The kingdom for which Christ prayed would indeed have come. The promise would be at least in process of rapid fulfilment : “Lo, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them and they shall be his people, and he will be their God.”

I have read of a great French writer* in the years which followed the first French Revolu-

*Georges Sand. I owe the illustration to Dean Stanley.

tion, who, when on the point of receiving her first communion, was terrified by the doubts which forced themselves in upon her mind, and which were greatly stimulated by the controversies then raging upon the subject. She was tranquillised by fixing her mind upon the one original scene from which the Christian Eucharist had sprung.

Let us endeavour to do the same. Let us fix our minds upon the faith and the love which this scene brings so vividly before us. Let us pray that communion with Christ may mean for us an increase of these heavenly characteristics. Such communion will be to us a protection against present evils, a refreshment on our way through this world, and the assurance of an eternal life.

THE EUCHARIST.

II. THE ABUSES AT CORINTH.

“For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body.”

1 COR. xi. 29.

THE Holy Communion or Eucharist, as we now know it, is emphatically and indeed exclusively a religious act. It is the chief incident of our Christian worship. It is celebrated in church, and most often on the day when the business of the world has stopped, when traffic has been suspended and the noisy streets of the city are still. The altar in most of our churches recalls but faintly the table at which our Lord and His twelve disciples sat down. The lights that often burn on it have a very remote connection with the many lights that lit up the room at Troas where S. Paul broke bread. It is generally separated by a rail or barrier from the rest of the building. Those who eat the sacred

bread and drink the wine do so in a kneeling attitude expressive of awe and reverence. They take but a small fragment of bread and do but moisten their lips with the wine. Such is the Holy Eucharist as it is administered in one of our own churches.

* In the churches of Roman Christendom the separation of the sacred feast from ordinary life is still more marked. Often there is no general communion. It is only the priest who partakes of the sacred food, and where the laity do participate it is only of the bread they partake. No cup is put into their hands. Thus, we may say that everywhere through Christendom in greater or less degree, the name of Lord's Supper by which the Eucharist was once known has ceased to be applicable to it or to describe it. It has ceased to be a supper in the ordinary sense of that word.

Now, this great transformation is not for a moment to be thought of as if it were the diversion of a great institution from its original purpose, the corruption of something originally excellent by human error and superstition. The transformation was quite inevitable as the Church increased in numbers. Every change

was introduced at the bidding of an urgent necessity. As we follow the history, we are watching the child as he grows into the man, the tree as it puts forth blossoms and leaves and fruits.

It is not our part, as we traverse the spacious fields of history, and see the plants growing there, to say that they ought not to have taken the form they actually did take. They have taken the form it has pleased Him to give them who giveth to every seed its own body.

Moreover, the Eucharist, as we know it, is indeed to us, in proportion to our earnestness, a communion of the body and blood of Christ. He joins us with Him, unworthy though we be, in those thoughts and emotions which at this solemn moment were filling His soul. He raises us up to the eminence upon which He stood and from which He contemplated the establishment here on earth of the heavenly kingdom, the final fulfilment of God's gracious purposes towards mankind.

All this is true. None the less has one most important aspect of the sacred feast been put out of sight and hidden away by the trans-

formation which the Eucharist has in the lapse of ages undergone. And it is upon this aspect I would now fix your attention.

The change which has been silently effected may be expressed by saying that in primitive times the Eucharist was far more intimately associated with the daily life of Christians than it now is. I do not merely mean that they thought of its meaning more than we do and were more deeply affected by it as they went about their daily affairs. I mean more than this.

We have every reason to believe that in the first days every meal of which the disciples of Christ partook in common, and in their Master's name, was a Lord's Supper or Eucharist. This, we may make bold to affirm, and nothing less than this, was our Lord's intention. He wished to make every one of their common meals a Eucharist and communion with Him. He did not intend to restrict such communion to one occasion or one solemn observance. He wished to extend it to every meal in which they joined together in His name.

Why do I affirm this so confidently? It is because the allusions to the Eucharist in the

Acts and by S. Paul leave us in no doubt that this was in the first instance its nature.

We find the breaking of bread mentioned on three different occasions previous to the excesses at Corinth, and on each the social character of the Eucharistic meal is quite manifest.

We read of the disciples in Jerusalem, after the Crucifixion, that "day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart." Here their public worship in the temple is contrasted with the Eucharistic meals of which they partook in their own houses. This was the primitive Christian Eucharist. It is to one of these meals we are introduced subsequently at Troas on the occasion of the Apostle's farewell to the Church of this place. The day is the first day of the week, the time is the evening, and the place is an upper room where many lights are burning. The proceedings are prolonged until a very late hour. At last we read that when the Apostle had "broken the bread, and eaten, and had talked with them a long while, even

till break of day, so he departed." Again there was plainly some Eucharistic element in the meal in which the Apostle joined with the crew of the storm-tossed vessel. He entreats them to take food, and assures them that not a hair of any of them shall perish. Then "when he had said this, and had taken bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all: and he brake it and began to eat."

The social character of each of these Eucharists is quite unmistakable. It is the common meal of the Christian society which is invested with a sacred significance and made the vehicle of a holy communion. I cannot doubt that it was of these meals the Apostle was thinking when he said, "Whether therefore ye eat and drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

I will not follow the history further, nor will my narrow limits allow me to describe the Eucharist at Corinth. It must be enough to say that the Eucharist had there ceased to be a Lord's Supper because it had ceased to be a common meal. It is true the members of the Church met together in one place for its celebration. In this sense the repast was common.

But in no other. The food upon the table was not common, for the wealthier persons kept the viands they had brought and consumed them without waiting for their poorer brethren. Nor was there any common feeling of love and reverence to bind those present together in sacred communion. They had forgotten the circumstances of the Lord's last Supper. The whole scene had faded away out of their minds. The solemn words of Christ had ceased to be remembered. The Holy Eucharist had been transformed into a mere display of selfishness—an occasion of gluttony and drunkenness.

No sadder spectacle is presented in the Church's history. The great poet of Scotland is supposed to have been seriously injured by the banquets and festivities given in his honour during the short period of recognition which followed the first discovery of his genius. "What," asks the historian* indignantly, "had he to do at such banquets, blending the thick smoke of intoxication with the fire that had been lent him from heaven?" "What," we may well ask, "had the unquenchable faith and strong love which prompted the

* Carlyle.

words, ‘This is my body,’ ‘This is my blood,’ to do with such drunken orgies as the Apostle here describes?”

We complain sometimes of people who fear that the conception of charity may be lowered and desecrated among us by the means employed to raise charitable funds. Let us be sure that we cannot be too watchful. The best when it is corrupted becomes the worst. Hardly more than twenty years separated our Lord’s last Supper from the riotous feasting into which it had here degenerated by a gradual, and, as it no doubt seemed at each particular step, a quite innocent transition or development.

The Apostle expresses his opinion of this scandalous perversion by saying, “He that eateth, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself if he discern not the body.”

The vital question plainly is, What does he mean by the body? To this question we can return an unhesitating answer. The Body of Christ was to the Apostle the company of Christ’s faithful people. This is the meaning he always puts upon the expression. For as the material “body,” he affirms, “is one, and hath

many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free."

This is the body which he who does not discern, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself. These Corinthians had forgotten Christian fraternity. Their Eucharist had become an occasion of private feasting. No corporate feeling joined those present together in Holy Communion. This was their grievous offence. This was the intolerable scandal. The body they failed to discern was not the bread upon the table, but the mystical fellowship into which Christ had knit them together.

Now, this is the aspect of the Eucharist which the changes of time have obscured and well-nigh effaced. It is no longer to us a visible and unmistakable symbol of fraternity, whereas this was in primitive times its very foremost message, its loudest call. Hence the holy kiss with which the faithful used to greet each other at these feasts. Hence the practice of sending portions of the sacred food to those who, without their own consent, were absent,

to the sick or to those in prison. Fraternity was stamped upon every incident of the holy feast. Those who joined in it were all brethren because they all partook of the one bread. This is the call we have well-nigh ceased to hear.

We hear much at the present time of what is called socialism or communism—the endeavour to efface or lessen the inequalities of wealth and social position by legislation. And sometimes we find Christ our Lord claimed as a socialist and the primitive Christian society represented as an endeavour after communism. Now, there is one important respect in which the primitive Church of Christ distinguishes itself from all socialistic commonwealths of which I have ever heard.

The fraternity which this Church aims at and expresses is to be effected by the silent and spontaneous operation of Christian love. It is not to be imposed upon the society by legislation. It is to be the natural, involuntary expression of the Christian spirit. The Church of which we read at the beginning of the Acts was a communistic society—one whose members called nothing they possessed their own.

But they made this surrender under no compulsion. It was open to them to keep any or all of their possessions. And whatever any man kept remained his own.

Christian fraternity, let me repeat, can only be realised by the voluntary action of Christians. It is beyond doubt sadly violated in the Church of to-day. It is violated by those divisions which separate Christians into rival Churches, and prevent them, through the loyalty they owe to their own Church order, joining in a common Eucharist. These divisions are being increasingly taken to heart by earnest men, and we may reasonably hope that they will be much less conspicuous a hundred years hence than they now are.

Still, if we suppose them entirely effaced, if we suppose Roman Catholics, and English Churchmen, and Nonconformists, joining together in communion of the body and blood of Christ, Christian fraternity might still remain a far-off ideal.

It is only by the habitual bearing of individual Christians, by the attitude of the rich towards the poor and the poor towards the rich, by mutual understanding and forbearance

and love, by the charity that hopeth and believeth all things—it is only thus the Church can minister to the wounds of our diseased and smitten society and become again what she was for a few brief years, the undeniable Body of Christ.

THE EUCHARIST.

III. THE REAL PRESENCE.

“Jesus saith to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father.”
S. JOHN xx. 17.

DEATH makes a decisive change in every intimacy. We may try to persuade ourselves that the dead have not really left us. But we know that our relationship to them has been entirely transformed. We may speak to them, but they will not answer. We may call, but we shall not know that they hear.

Our Lord had prepared His disciples for this decisive transformation in His intercourse with them. Indeed, He had said, or implied, that His withdrawal would bring about a closer and more fruitful communion than had been possible while He was with them in the flesh. “It is expedient for you,” He said, “that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter—the enlightening Spirit—will not come unto you.”

In spite of this, they would fain have perpetuated the old relationship, and continued to associate with Him as they had done in days gone by. It was, we may suppose, in response to some movement of Mary Magdalene, perhaps to clasp His feet, that the risen Jesus said to her, "Touch me not." There was something in His relationship to her which forbade such a touch. Perhaps the form she saw would have eluded her grasp and melted into thin air had she tried to hold it.

So the other disciples were very loath to believe that the cherished companionship had indeed come to an end, and that intercourse with their beloved Master must henceforth be that of spirit with spirit. For a time it was possible for them to believe that no irrevocable change had taken place, that Christ was still within the reach of the eye and the ear. At length, however, it was made clear that He had really gone away, that their eyes could no more behold Him, their hands no longer handle, their ears no longer catch His voice. His bodily personality was henceforth to be numbered among the things unseen. Material intercourse with Him was at an end. Com-

panionship in this sense had ceased. The tale of it had been told. Touch Him in this way they could not any more.

Still, it has ever been the belief of Christians that Christ, in spite of this great transformation, does still continue to be really present in their midst, that they can still hold communion with Him, invisible though He be, and He with them. This is the assurance He gives them, as we hear Him speak in S. John's gospel: "I will not," He says, "leave you orphaned, I will come to you." And this assurance His disciples have again and again felt to be in their case realised. The consciousness has been imparted to them in hours of trial and danger, that the Master whom they served did indeed stand by them to protect and to bless. In particular, Christians have always believed that in eating the bread and drinking the wine of which He had used such solemn language, they were supping with Him; that these creatures of God's hands were at once the memorials of His passion and the veils of His continued presence.

We have only, however, to think of such spiritual communion to perceive that the very

conception of it is difficult to grasp and to hold. How shall we explain to an ordinary man what it means? Will he not tell us that we are vague, over-subtle, trying, perhaps, to put him off with shadows?

It was these difficulties, we may believe, which caused the conceptions of Christ's Eucharistic presence to assume, as the ages passed, an increasingly materialistic form. I do not mean that the Church's teachers resorted to these material notions to simplify their task of exposition. I mean that Christians generally reduced, after a fashion of which we have countless illustrations, a spiritual truth to terms that were easily intelligible and unambiguous. So, as thought on sacred subjects became stagnant, and the darkness of ignorance settled down upon the Church, gross fancies arose, and repulsive stories found credence.

I cannot believe that the theologians of the Church of Rome do essentially differ on this subject from ourselves. If you affirm, as they do, that the presence of Christ is a presence which no sense of ours can discern, that it is beyond the reach of taste and touch, what is this but to say that it is a spiritual presence?

Putting aside, then, all materialism, let us ask what is the continuous presence of Christ among men as it is represented in the New Testament?

We find it pictured in two different fashions.

(1) Christ is said to dwell with those who hold moral communion with Him, who keep His sayings, who share His faith towards God, His love towards mankind. Such persons eat His flesh and drink His blood. They dwell with Him, and He with them. He keeps them privily—to use the intimate language of the Psalmist—with His presence from the provoking of men; He admits them into His pavilion, where they are safe from the strife of tongues. It is no longer even they who live, but He who lives in them. He has gathered them to His bosom; He goes with them, and gives them rest.

This is a most consoling assurance. Whither, we ask, shall we go to find Christ? Must we go up into the heavens, strain the intelligence and the imagination, so as to enter the world into which He has passed? In vain would such an effort be. We cannot enter that invisible world by the exercise of any faculty

we possess. We shall indeed follow Him into it, but not yet. In the meantime, we are shut in within the world of sense. Must we, then, travel back across the long reaches of time, and rediscover Him as He appeared to the eyes of His contemporaries? Such an endeavour is indeed most profitable, because it enables us to disengage His likeness from those mistaken notions by which it has been distorted and falsified. Yet suppose that it could be completely successful. Suppose the historical Jesus to appear here in our midst. Suppose Him to stand upon the steps of this chancel, or His body to lie upon that altar as it lay before it was placed in the tomb, would this necessarily be the real presence we desire? Surely we might still be as far from Him, and He from us, as was Judas who betrayed Him, or Pilate who condemned, or Caiaphas who crucified.

If we would see the presence we wish for, we must think of a far different situation. We must imagine a building, plain, or richly ornamented, in which there is gathered together a company, small or large, to whom His promises are a consolation, who have His words as a law within their heart, who are habitually

impelled, restrained, uplifted, by His remembrance ; there will He be really present in their midst. Or we must imagine a room, in a palace or a cottage, in which there is but one obedient disciple, conscious, it may be, of fightings without and fears within, who yet in their midst lifts up his heart to an unseen Father whom he believes to be infinitely gracious and closely near ; there also in that room is Christ really present. Wherever there is such heartfelt communion, there He is. Where there is no such communion, whatever else may be present or absent, there He is not.

(2) Closely akin to this is the other form which His presence assumes. He is repeatedly represented as appearing to us in the persons of those who are less fortunate than we are, who stand to us in the relation in which the weak stand to the strong, or the defenceless to the powerful. Such are poor people, children, the ignorant, the sorrow-stricken and lonely, prisoners and captives. These are not able to meet us on equal terms. We may impose upon them, and they cannot detect the imposture. We may steal from them, and they cannot resist the theft. We may pass them

by on the other side, reserving our attentions for those who can make us some adequate return, whom there is some honour to be obtained by noticing, and no voice will be raised on their behalf. It is in the persons of these we are taught to see Christ reincarnate, to hear ~~Him~~ say to those who do them wrong, It is Me whom you persecute; to those who take their part, It is to Me you minister, "Forasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."

Here again is Christ really present, not now only in the silence of the church and the seclusion of the home, but in the streets and lanes of the city, wherever men resort for business or pleasure. He is the beggar with whom Martin shared his cloak, the leper whom Elizabeth of Hungary placed in her bed, the poor wayfaring man of grief whom the Moravian Montgomery saw often passing him on his way.

So the faith He established has been prevented from degenerating into an arid intellectual system, or a mere historical tradition, and has been connected in the most effective way with the wants of mankind. We may indeed hope that the numbers of the unfortu-

nate will be greatly lessened, as social science pursues its progress and social arrangements are made more perfect. Still, to the end of time there will be, as far as we can see, stronger and weaker, richer and poorer, those able to receive knowledge and those not able to receive it. The order of the world gives us no reason for supposing that there will ever be equality among mankind. Nor does any reformer, as far as I know, hope for such equality. They would all accept what an eminent advocate of reform* has said on the subject: "Such pretensions," he has written, "as that every man could be made equally fit for every function, or that not only should each have an equal chance, but that he who uses his chance well and sociably should be kept on a level with him who uses it ill and unsociably, or does not use it at all—the whole of this is obviously most illusory and most disastrous; and in whatever degree any set of men have ever taken it up, to that degree they have paid the penalty."

To the end of time there will be those who have to run the race of life and yet who are

* Lord Morley.

very ill fitted for the difficult and dangerous contest, those crippled by disease, prostrated by misfortune which no foresight could avert, staggering in their weakness under burdens which strong men would find it hard to carry. This is so now. It always will be so, as far as we can tell.

As long as it is so, so long will the suffering Christ be present in our midst. So long will it be possible for us to minister to Him, or to turn away our faces from Him and fix them only upon the things—and they are many—which charm and delight us.

Here, then, in the possibility of such ministries is a real table of the Lord spread before us, to which we can come and eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood. Here is a cup of blessing which ever overflows. Let it not be spread in vain, as for guests who refuse a gracious invitation. If, indeed, we eat and drink of this rich feast, then shall our communion with Christ, whenever we consciously seek His face, be a real communion, a participation on our part in the very body and blood of the Lord.

THE EUCHARIST.

IV. THE BODY OF CHRIST.

“The bread which we break, is it not a communion of
the body of Christ ?”

1 COR. x. 16.

THE institution of the Eucharist has been described by four different writers in the New Testament. It has been related by the first three Evangelists, and again by S. Paul. It would, however, be a mistake to regard these as four independent narratives. It is hardly open to doubt that S. Matthew is here simply repeating what S. Mark had already written. The variations between the two are quite unimportant. Nor can we regard the other two versions as distinct and separate the one from the other. S. Luke and S. Paul were closely associated, and their accounts of this solemn incident are intimately related, and plainly emanate from one and the same source.

Thus our authorities for what took place are

reduced to two—the first two Evangelists on the one hand, and S. Luke and S. Paul on the other.

When we compare the two versions we notice one variation which exceeds the rest in importance. It is only in the later account, that of S. Luke and S. Paul, that we find the command, "Do this in remembrance of me." No such words are found in the first two gospels.

This may appear at first sight a most important omission. It may be urged that what is undoubtedly the earlier version of the words of Christ does not provide for any repetition of the Eucharist feast, that He does not here seemingly contemplate any recurrence of the feast, until such time as He should drink with His disciples the new wine of the Father's kingdom.

Any difficulty, however, that this may occasion will, I believe, disappear if we remember that these feasts began in all probability during our Lord's lifetime, that the solemn supper on the evening of the betrayal was only the last of many, and that when He had left the earth His disciples only continued in spontaneous

love and reverence to do what they had been in the habit of doing while He was with them. They broke the bread as He had taught them. They joined in the Eucharistic feasts He had initiated. And never, we may be sure, would they be more sensible of His continued presence than when they ate of the bread and drank of the wine they had blessed after His example.

From the very first, however, we may be sure, the Lord's farewell supper would overshadow all its predecessors in the memory of His disciples, and would assume a solemn significance. The words He had then spoken of the bread and the wine would engrave themselves deeper and deeper upon their recollection. They would be treasured as we treasure the last words of those we love. They would be rehearsed every time the feast was celebrated. As the years passed they would gather to themselves new meanings, and appear more and more as the pledges of a mysterious and yet a most consoling promise.

I return now once more to the saying, "This is my body." What do the words mean?

Let us observe, then, that we have no means

of knowing all that they meant to Him who uttered them. He did not say what He meant. Nor do the disciples appear to have asked Him, perhaps because His meaning was quite plain to them. He spoke the words—perhaps the most eventful ever uttered by human lips—without note or comment, defence or illustration. They fell from Him, seed of boundless fertility cast into the seed-field of time.

Thus the very best interpretation we can put upon them may be that attributed to Queen Elizabeth :

“Christ was the Word and spake it,
He took the bread and brake it;
And what the Word doth make it
That I believe and take it.”

We may say : I do not feel able to determine at this distance of time what was the first meaning of these solemn words. But I have sufficient confidence in Him who uttered them to believe that He would not make upon me any demand with which I should be either unable or unwilling to comply. Whatever He meant by them, that meaning I unfeignedly accept.

There is, however, one feature of the words which we should not fail to mark. They are

not a prophecy nor a promise. They declare what already is. What our Lord says to His disciples is: While you eat this bread and drink this cup, it is upon Me in My entire personality you feed, upon Me as I have revealed Myself to you by word and deed. It is I who am your living bread, your present support, your hope for the future.

Thus if we ask, What is it that makes the bread of the Eucharistic feast to be the body of Christ, that transfigures and consecrates it and makes it the veil of a mysterious presence, the answer cannot be for a moment doubtful. It is the faith and hope and brotherly love within the souls of those who join in the feast. Where these are, there a consecrating touch has passed over the material elements. They are no longer ordinary bread and wine. They are the very body and blood of the Lord. Where, on the other hand, these consecrating agents are absent—where, instead of faith and hope and love, there is, as there was at Corinth, self-indulgence and greed—there the supper is not at all the Lord's Supper; the place which Christ should fill is empty, and no transfiguring touch passes over the bread and the wine.

And thus, starting from this conception, we see how naturally the Apostle could regard the body of Christ, as he always does, as equivalent to the company of Christ's faithful people. Such people feed upon Christ. Nay, they are Christ Himself—members of which [•]He is the head, His hands and feet, the perpetuators of His presence in the visible world.

So the body of Christ was interpreted from the very beginning. One of the oldest monuments of Christian literature is a short treatise entitled the Teaching of the Apostles, which may even have been composed within the first century. It contains two prayers, one intended to precede and the other to follow the distribution of the sacred elements. Those who join in the feast are bidden to say as regards the broken bread: “We give Thee thanks, O our Father, for the life and knowledge which Thou didst make known unto us through Thy Son Jesus; Thine is the glory for ever and ever. As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, and being gathered together became one, so may Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of

the earth into Thy Kingdom : for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever and ever."

This is obviously another expression of the conception of S. Paul. As the bread is composed of particles which were once scattered as grain upon separate hill-sides, so the Christian society is one body made up of various members, and that body is the body of Christ. It is the form by which His spirit becomes visible. His presence is perpetuated, is brought within the reach of the eye and the ear by His real disciples. Wherever such disciples are, there He is. This is what the body of Christ invariably meant to S. Paul. And in giving it this meaning he was not taking liberties with the solemn words of Christ. For whether you say that the disciples of Christ feed upon their Master's body by reason of the faith and love which bind Him and them together, or whether you say that they themselves are that body by reason of this same union, is obviously little more than a matter of phraseology.

So we are brought back to the two forms in which Christ is said in the New Testament to be still present in this world. He abides in

the hearts of those who love Him and keep His sayings, and He is reincarnate in their persons as they move to and fro through the world, and perform the ministries to which He invited or summoned them. Where two or three of them are gathered together in His name, there is He in their midst. Where they are persecuted, He suffers with them. Where they are visited, cheered, aided, He is strengthened and refreshed. Nor does He limit these representatives by any rigid definition so as to exclude from the number all except His professed disciples. He implies that the wants and sorrows of humanity at large are His, that in the humiliations of men, His brethren, His own side is pierced, in their wounds His own sacred heart bleeds.

Most profound indeed and consoling of truths, rebuking the confused ambitions by which we would fain perpetuate our individuality, when we have passed away from the earth. Other teachers and founders have cared that their names should be honoured and remembered. He cared not for this, provided only that His life was continued in other lives. In their happiness He is made happy. In their

honour He is honoured. In their reception He is received.

Such, then, is the Body of Christ as S. Paul understood the expression. The spirit of man is under all circumstances an invisible agency. It comes we cannot tell whence. It goes we cannot tell whither. God gave it, and to Him it returns. We only know of it by its manifestations through the medium of the flesh. It speaks by the tongue, and listens by the ear, and looks through the eye; but it is not either the tongue or the eye or the ear. So we must suppose the invisible Spirit of Christ to make itself known through the men and women who are moved by His words or His life. In their lives He lives. In their persons He has risen from the grave, never again to die.

We may believe that this company will become larger and larger as He is better known and understood, so that it will eventually include all mankind within its limits. We may indeed scarcely dare to hope that men will be equally in earnest in following Christ or equally able to understand what following Him means. But we may believe that they will increasingly recognise themselves to

be what they really are, many members of one body, each needing the help of the others, each lacking something which the others can supply. When this conviction has been reached then indeed the war-drum will throb no longer, and the battle-flags may hang as venerable relics of the childhood of humanity.

In another respect, too, our imaginations may enlarge this company so as to include within it not only the living but the dead. We are all conscious of the immense debt we owe to the dead, and of the influence they still exercise upon us although we can no longer see them. Our life would be immeasurably poorer if our intercourse were restricted to the living, and we were shut off from all communion with those, famous or obscure, whose warfare has been accomplished, and whom we shall in no long time follow into the world unseen.

Whether their spirits have passed hence in the fulness of their strength, with eye undimmed and natural force unabated, or burdened by the weariness and decay of a long pilgrimage, we still think of them, and feel that they have not been wholly lost.

We know that they are in Him in whom we

also live and move and have our being. They live because He lives. Our hope is so to follow their good examples that with them we may be partakers of His heavenly kingdom.

THE EUCHARIST.

V. THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” 1 S. JOHN i. 6, 7.

THE ministry of Christ, as it is represented to us in S. John’s gospel, began and ended at a feast. Feasts are with us pre-eminently occasions of rejoicing. Yet with us too there are sad feasts as well as merry ones. And the two feasts which began and closed the earthly ministry of Jesus were both marked by sombre as well as by glad associations. In the midst of the rejoicings at Cana of Galilee we hear the solemn reference by Christ to His hour, an expression which in this gospel generally points onwards to His death. And over the last Supper there rested the unmistakable

shadow of impending separation. The supper took place on the night on which He was betrayed, and the traitor sat at the table with the other eleven disciples.

The fourth gospel makes no reference to the institution at this supper of the Eucharist, no doubt because it presupposes on the part of its readers an acquaintance with the earlier records. It was not necessary to relate again what was already well known.

Going back, then, to these earlier narratives we find in them one saying which they all alike mention. We find our Lord in all three accounts solemnly pronouncing His blood to be the blood of a covenant, "This is my blood of the covenant," in the first two gospels, in the version of S. Luke and S. Paul: "This is the new covenant in my blood."

No saying of Christ is better attested than this strange and startling announcement. We may take it as established beyond all possibility of doubt that He did thus declare His blood to be the blood of a covenant.

The ancient usage to which He thus pointed back is well known to us. In the early stages of human history every contract was invested

with a religious sanction. The two contracting parties appeared before God and invoked Him as a witness of their good faith. It was customary to do this by allowing the priest to offer some victim in sacrifice, and to sprinkle their own persons and the altar with the blood. So they took God to witness that they meant what they said, and that they would keep their promise.

Like these human contracts there are in the Old Testament two covenants or compacts in which God Himself is represented as one of the contracting parties and the people whom He had chosen as the other. The first of these was ratified at the foot of Mount Sinai, when God for His part, speaking by the mouth of Moses, undertook to lead the people into Canaan, and to protect them there, and they for their part pledged themselves to serve and worship no God but Him.

This early covenant was followed by another which completed it, but concerning which we do not hear, as in the former case, of any visible or formal ratification. This second compact was one by which God on His side promised—I mean of course by the mouth of

prophets—to establish a heavenly commonwealth here in the world, whose citizens should dwell securely under His protection, unmolested by foes without or dissensions within. Such was the Divine promise, while the nation on its side undertook to cleave to its Divine King in faith and obedience.

This was the Messianic covenant, and it was no doubt of this that our Lord here speaks. We may understand Him to say, This contract which has been for so long the object of our own and our fathers' hopes is about to be ratified, as were the treaties of old, by the shedding of blood. A victim is to be slain, only it is now I Myself who shall be this victim. The Messianic covenant—the Divine promise of a heavenly kingdom—shall soon be confirmed by My own blood.

We have only one further step to take, and then we have done with exposition. In the ratification of the early compacts there is no mention of the drinking of blood. The contracting parties were, as I have said, sprinkled with the victim's blood. They never, as far as we know, drank this blood. Indeed, such a suggestion, repulsive to us, would have been

doubly repulsive to a Jew, for he was expressly forbidden by the law ever to touch blood.

- That our Lord here disregards and violates these associations is due, I believe, to a fact to which in reading the gospels we pay far too little heed. We suppose the words of Christ we find here to have been all spoken in that calm, passionless tone that we associate with sages and philosophers. In reality the words may often have been as sparks flying out from a blazing fire of passion and conviction. So at least they frequently appear to us. Can we suppose Him to have been unmoved when He said, "Let the dead bury their dead," or "He that hateth not father and mother cannot be my disciple," or "If thine eye offend thee pluck it out"? Do not these sayings bear unmistakable witness to the burning feeling from which they issued?

So we may suppose Him to say here: It is not enough that you should be sprinkled with the blood of this new covenant. No such external connection with Me is sufficient. My faith and hope and love must fill your heart and pulse through your veins. You must drink My blood even as you now drink this

fruit of the vine. So close must our union be.

So we can understand why the blood of Christ has so often in the language of Christian devotion been identified with the love of Christ. For it was love to the unseen Father and to men His brethren which at this supreme moment comprehended and embraced all other feelings within the Redeemer's soul. His love to God was about to show itself in obedience even unto death, and He was about to give the final proof of love towards mankind: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends."

So in one of the earliest Christian letters which, apart from the New Testament, have come down to us we find the writer, a bishop * on his way to martyrdom, saying: "I have no delight in the food of corruption or in the delights of this life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ, who was of the seed of David, and for a draught I desire His blood, which is love incorruptible." And in another letter we find the same writer exhorting a Christian community, with whom

* Ignatius.

he had relations, in the following moving words: "I keep watch over you betimes, as my beloved, for I foresee the snares of the devil. Do ye therefore arm yourselves with gentleness, and recover yourselves in faith, which is the flesh of the Lord, and in love, which is the blood of Jesus Christ. Let none of you bear a grudge against his neighbour." So Livingstone in the last months of his African wanderings asked of his own soul, "What is the blood of Christ?" and made answer, "It is the inherent and everlasting mercy of God made apparent to human eyes and ears." Thus our own Bishop Ken was not exaggerating when he said, "To obtain eternal life all I am to do is reduced to one word only, and that is love."

The blood of Christ is then, we may say, the love of Christ, displayed so that all may see it. It is with this love that the Eucharistic cup overflows. It was not, indeed, that the death upon the Cross was marked by any considerable loss of blood. Crucifixion was seldom, we are told, so attended. Death in this form of execution resulted from the strain to which the heart was exposed by the un-

natural position of the body. The wounds made by the nails in the hands and the feet would speedily close, and death commonly supervened without any other effusion of blood. In this respect crucifixion differed markedly from most other forms of violent death. We read of public executions where the executioner, the victim, the scaffold, and even the near onlookers were literally bathed in blood. Strikingly unlike these sanguinary deaths was that of Him, not one of whose bones was broken, and who would appear to have lost only the few drops of blood that would flow from the nails and the puncture of the spear.

Yet these few drops have become in Christian minds the most precious of pledges, the most eloquent of symbols, the pledge of God's gracious purpose to set up His tabernacle among men, and dwell with them and be their God, the symbol of that love which will not rest while there is one sheep still straying upon the mountains, one soul still ensnared in the confusions and deceits of this world.

“There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins,

And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains."

So sang the gentle and unfortunate Cowper, expressing the feelings of many a humble and contrite heart conscious of the cleansing power of the precious blood of Jesus.

This, then, is the Eucharistic cup of which we sing :

" My God, and is Thy table spread,
And doth Thy cup with love o'erflow,
Thither be all Thy people led
And let them all Thy sweetness know."

It is concerning this Christ puts to us the question : Are you able to drink of the cup that I drink of ? It is not indeed that we can know the love of Christ in its fulness, for this love passeth knowledge. The question is only whether we really desire to be possessed by it, and to show it forth, here amidst the push and jostle of the world, in our buyings and sellings, our work and worship, when we sit in our houses and walk by the way, when we lie down and rise. Is this our real desire when we drink the Lord's cup ? Or do we share this cup, not because we desire to be made partakers of His love, but to escape from the

necessity of making this love our own and giving evidences of it in our dealings with each other? Are we nourishing spite and vindictiveness in our hearts while we take the cup into our hands? Then not for us is the communion of the blood of Christ. We do but drink judgment to ourselves, not discerning the Lord's blood. A veil is over our faces. No sacred presence is beside or within us. No celestial harmonies overpower the discords of the earth.

Remember, then, I would entreat you, as you kneel at the altar this Eastertide, that the blood of Christ is nothing material which can save you, apart from your own moral co-operation with Him. It is time for us to have done with all pretences and insincerities, and to learn the worship which is in spirit and in truth, for the Easters are slipping rapidly by and it is high time that we should awake out of sleep. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light." Measure your nearness to Him by the only trustworthy measure—the love towards God and man which fills your heart. Strive to share His love towards God whom you do not see, towards your

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brethren whom you do see, have fellowship thus with Him and with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ shall assuredly cleanse you from all sin.

THE EUCHARIST.

VI. THE UNWORTHY COMMUNICANT.

“He that eateth my bread lifteth up his heel against me.”

S. JOHN xiii. 18.

At the table with Jesus during His last Supper there sat one unworthy communicant. Even the influence of Christ was not irresistible. Intimately associated with Him throughout His public ministry was a disciple whom this close intercourse, instead of attracting, had repelled, had driven away from the light further and further into the darkness.

This is the mystery of human choice. It is impossible across this gulf of years to fathom the feelings and motives of the traitor Apostle. It has been the well-nigh universal belief of Christians that although the love of money may have counted for something in his betrayal of his Master, avarice was not his only reason.

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When we consider his almost immediate repentance when he perceived what he had done, it is reasonable to believe that up to the very last he was moved by some fallacious hope, some piteous confusion.

It is in any case certain that although in bodily proximity he was very near to Christ at the last Supper, he was yet separated from Him more effectually than if broad seas had rolled between. The question has indeed been raised whether Judas did really partake of the bread and the wine which Christ so solemnly blessed, or whether he may not have left the room before this benediction was pronounced.

We cannot here base any positive conclusion upon the narrative of the fourth Evangelist, for this gospel makes, as I have said, no reference to the institution of the Eucharist. Thus we should not be warranted in identifying the sop after whose reception Judas immediately went out with the Eucharistic bread, although our own Prayer Book does appear to make this identification. In one of the longer exhortations by which the minister is directed to give warning for the celebration of the Holy Communion, and which are now,

owing to their length, but rarely used, he is bidden to say in words of extreme severity: "Therefore if any of you be a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of His Word, an adulterer, or be in malice or envy, or in any other grievous crime, repent you of your sins or else come not to that Holy Table; lest after the taking of that holy Sacrament, the devil enter into you, as he entered into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquities, and bring you to destruction both of body and soul."

This language is not such as we should now use, however anxious we may be to guard against a profanation of the Sacrament. Still, we ought not to be blind to the sense of responsibility and the love of souls which prompted it. We are reminded by it of what Calvin tells us of his own feelings in Geneva: "When I had to administer the Sacrament," he says, "I was tortured by anxiety for the state of the souls of those for whom I should one day have to render an account before God; there were many whose faith seemed to me uncertain, nay doubtful, and yet they all thronged to the table of the Lord without distinction: I cannot tell you with what tor-

ments my conscience was beset day and night." Such was the sense of responsibility, surely excessive, which prompted the language of our exhortation.

Yet if we cannot certainly pronounce the sop given to Judas to have been the Eucharistic bread we may still feel reasonably sure that he did partake of this bread with the other eleven disciples. There is no suggestion in the earlier gospels that he had previously left the room. The inference we should draw from them would be that he waited till the supper had ended, and instead of accompanying Jesus to Gethsemane, went to the soldiers, who, as he had arranged, were to be in readiness to follow him when he gave them the signal.

Thus he, like the other disciples, ate of the bread and drank of the cup which Christ declared to be His body and His blood. He was an unworthy communicant, joining in the Eucharistic feast and yet not discerning the Lord's body.

So he leads us to put the anxious question : What is it constitutes an unworthy reception of the body and blood of Christ ? What should keep us away from the feast to which

Christ invites us—from the bread of immortality, from the cup overflowing with love?

Against one misconception the sermons I have had the privilege to preach to you will have sufficiently warned us. We shall not suppose that the Eucharist can under any circumstances be a remedy for unrepented sin. The bread can be no magic talisman to open to us the gates of heaven apart from our own heartfelt repentance. If I am living in sin, clinging to some pleasant but sinful habit, cherishing vindictive feelings towards my neighbour, I do not secure forgiveness of the sin by eating of the bread and drinking of the wine. I must first be reconciled to my neighbour, and then come to the altar.

It is to guard against this misuse that our Liturgy causes the Ten Commandments to be rehearsed whenever the Holy Communion is administered. When we hear these Commandments read, we should have in our minds the Christian interpretation of them; we do not profess that we have kept them, but we do express our desire to keep them, saying, ‘Incline our hearts to keep this law.’

Let us now examine our question more particularly. Let us look at the table at which Jesus sat down with His disciples. Among these disciples there was one, and only one, unworthy communicant. Consider the eleven others.

Foremost among them was a man who in a few hours was to make the discovery that the strength of which he had thought himself capable was no better than weakness, who would throw in his lot with the enemies of Jesus, who would curse and swear, saying, "I know not the man"; who would be ashamed of the Master he loved. Yet he was not an unworthy communicant. We are not unworthy communicants because our best impulses are very unstable and untrustworthy, and because our goodness is like "the morning cloud and the early dew which passeth away." These tendencies are no impediments as long as we deplore them and strive to overcome them.

Among the eleven disciples, again, was one who insisted upon what seemed to him conclusive evidence before he would yield his assent. There is nothing blameworthy in this.

Credulity is not an excellence of character. The people who believe on insufficient grounds commonly fall away again in time of temptation. They are blown about by every wind of doctrine, and are at the mercy of every plausible speaker. We may be in the position of Thomas, desirous to learn of Christ, willing to follow where He leads, and still we may be worthy communicants, saying, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

Now cross the dividing line and look at the unfortunate man who certainly did not in any sense communicate with Christ, although he ate the bread and drank the cup which Christ had declared to be His body and blood.

He was an unworthy communicant, because he was at this moment separated from Christ by an immense gulf of thought and feeling. He was eating his Master's bread, and yet he was lifting up his heel against Him. We know not what his aims and hopes were, but whatever explanation of the treachery of Judas we adopt, whether we ascribe it to a desire on his part to force the Redeemer to show Himself in His true character, or (which seems to me at least less likely) to mere sordid avarice, in

either case we miss in him the two essential marks of the worthy communicant.

1. He has lost the sense of discipleship. He has made himself the assured critic and unerring judge of the world's Redeemer. Reckless self-assertion has taken the place of humility. Reverence no longer forbids even personal violence. Such a state of mind obviously makes communion with Christ impossible. It is still worse if we suppose him to have been impelled by avarice. He would then have had the wages of iniquity in his possession at the very moment when he ate the sacred bread. Here surely is a spiritual state which should preclude an approach to the altar. Particular sayings of the Saviour may perplex us. We may be unable to fathom His motives or to picture completely His personality. Yet we may be His disciples, and believe that, if we knew all, He would stand out in our minds approved and triumphant. But without reverence on our part communion between us and Him there cannot be.

2. The other mark of the worthy communicant which we miss in Judas is hope. He appears to have repented of his treachery, as

I have said, almost as soon as he had perpetrated it, making open confession of his guilt, and flinging the paltry sum paid to him (no more than £5 of our money) across the barrier which separated the inner from the outer Temple court. His repentance had thus every worthy characteristic except one, that of trust in God, and its sure consequence, hope. This, again, seems an insuperable obstacle to communion. We may have committed the worst of crimes and yet God, if we will only trust Him, may raise us up again and place us among the princes. But if we deliberately shut the door of repentance, saying to ourselves, "I do not care what is right or wrong, I will take my own way and secure my own object," then indeed we have effectually prevented communion with Christ.

Judge therefore your own selves, brethren. I have never dared in the course of my ministry to urge anyone to come to the Holy Communion. I am too much afraid of a careless or a merely mechanical attendance; but I do unfeignedly believe that they who eat of this bread and drink of this cup with real self-knowledge and true penitence and the earnest

desire to escape from their sins, do indeed, as they move forward to the altar, come to Christ, and may rely upon His assurance that those who come to Him He will in nowise cast out.